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CHRYSOSTOM  
AND  
HIS MESSAGE

Selected and translated

by

STEPHEN NEILL



*CHRYSOSTOM AND HIS MESSAGE*

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# CHRYSOSTOM AND HIS MESSAGE

A Selection from the Sermons of  
St. John Chrysostom of Antioch  
and Constantinople

*by*

STEPHEN NEILL  
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Standard Version of the Bible*

## INTRODUCTION

John Chrysostom was the greatest preacher of the early Church, and this means that he must be reckoned among the greatest preachers of the word of God in the history of the Church from the days of the apostles to our own time. In his lifetime he was not known by the title "Chrysostomus", the golden-mouthed. This seems first to have been given to him rather more than a century after his death; but it is so suitable that it has stuck to him, and in fact Chrysostom is the name by which he is generally known.

The period during which he lived (about A.D. 345-407) was one of noise and fury in the Church. Most of the history books which deal with this period are full of great controversies about the faith, of Councils and decrees, and of those leading churchmen through whose efforts the lasting decisions on the doctrine of the Church were made. The great Athanasius himself lived on until A.D. 373. The life, and above all the sermons, of Chrysostom remind us that there was another side to the life of the Church in those strenuous days. The Church always lives principally in its simple and faithful people, whose names are not recorded in the history books, but who keep alight the flame of faith and pass it on to their children. Chrysostom in his sermons brings us very close to such people. We see them struggling hard to maintain purity of life and uprightness in the midst of a corrupt and degenerate society, in which pleasure was coming more and more to be the dominant aim of all classes. We learn a great deal about their weaknesses and failures—Chrysostom does not hold up to us any ideal picture of them—and we find them to be people very much like ourselves. Our circumstances are not the same as theirs; the problems of today are not quite those of the fourth and fifth centuries. But fifteen centuries have made

very little difference in essentials, and we find that the Christian conflict today is after all very much the same as it was all those long years ago. That is why Chrysostom's sermons have such a modern ring; again and again he seems to be speaking to us almost as a contemporary.

An earlier book in this series brought us into close contact with the Church in North Africa (*Faithful Witnesses*); one shortly to be published will introduce us to Alexandria (*Greeks and Christians*). Here we are to make the acquaintance of the great cities of Antioch and Constantinople.

Antioch, on the Orontes, the place where the disciples were first called Christians, was the great capital of the eastern world. It was a rich and prosperous city, with a long tradition of learning and culture. Its people were quick and intelligent, passionate and a little unstable; as we shall see later, they were liable to get themselves into serious trouble by action without thought. Chrysostom has to rebuke even the Christians again and again for their fierce love of pleasure and luxury. When the Emperor Julian the apostate, who had renounced Christianity to return to paganism, came to Antioch, he was to find that the people of that city had a marked gift for satire and mockery, which was not at all to his taste.

From the time of the apostles Antioch had been one of the greatest centres of the Christian world. It had not escaped the trials arising from the debates and divisions in the Church of the third and fourth centuries, and in fact through a large part of the life of Chrysostom there were three bishops in Antioch, each claiming to be the only true and orthodox bishop. But Antioch kept its own character and tradition, and made at least one very important contribution to the life of the whole Church. Alexandria was the home of the allegorical interpretation of the Bible, a method perfected by the great Origen, in which the literal meaning of the text was not regarded as having any great value, all attention being concentrated on the hidden and spiritual meaning. The school of Antioch followed exactly the opposite line. Its cool and careful

scholars started from the idea that the first task of the student is to understand just what the text means, and that the first task of the preacher is to expound that meaning of the text just as it stands. Carried too far, this method could make the Bible commonplace, and in fact the scholars of this tradition were accused of not taking seriously enough the truly divine quality of Jesus Christ. But we shall see how much Chrysostom had gained from his association with this school; he has a vivid imagination, but he very rarely allows himself to be carried away into those reaches of pure fancy into which the allegorical interpreter so easily strays.

Constantinople (Byzantium, New Rome) was a newcomer among the great cities of the Christian world. The city had been founded by Constantine as his new capital, nearer than Rome to the remote and dangerous eastern and northern frontiers of the empire. This was to be from the beginning a Christian city. It soon became great, rich and splendid, adorned with notable buildings, among which the most wonderful was Santa Sophia, the Church of the Heavenly Wisdom. Trade and commerce poured into its harbour from all the known world, and from unknown worlds such as that of China. Stalwart Anglo-Saxons served as bodyguard to the Emperor. The people, like those of Antioch, were intelligent and subtle. They liked nothing better than a good theological argument. But they were capricious, violent and cruel; to be bishop of Constantinople was never at any time an easy charge. Yet for more than a thousand years, Constantinople was by far the greatest city in the Christian world; when it fell before the Turks in A.D. 1453, a whole long era of Christian greatness came to an end.

Chrysostom was born in Antioch somewhere about A.D. 345, perhaps rather later. His father, an officer of some standing in the army, died very soon after his birth, and he was left in the hands of his mother Anthusa, a Christian woman of real piety, who saw to it that her son got the best education that was then available. The heart of education in those days was rhetoric, the art of the orator; and grammar and language and

the study of literature were all directed towards the perfection of rhetorical speech. Just about the time that Chrysostom was studying in Antioch, a young man named Augustine was following much the same course in Carthage in North Africa —except that Chrysostom knew little, if any, Latin, and Augustine never managed to learn Greek. The good side of this training was that the student learned to think clearly and to arrange and express his ideas in an orderly fashion. The bad side was a tendency to a very elaborate and artificial style. We see from Chrysostom's writings that he had acquired from the admired master of his school Libanius, an obstinate pagan, both the good and the bad. On the whole, he writes good Greek, clear and fluent; but at times he can lose himself in empty rhetoric, and then he becomes highly tedious. But there is an immense contrast between Libanius and his pupil. The old pagan really had nothing much to say, and said it at great length; what he wrote is hardly readable. Chrysostom had something to say. He had been seized by the power of the Christian Gospel; he is charged with a living message to living men. In consequence Chrysostom at his worst is usually more interesting than the best of his pagan contemporaries.

Chrysostom was baptized when he was eighteen, and three years later was ordained to the office of reader in the Church. Soon after, he was seized by the desire to leave the city and to live the life of a hermit; to many at that time this seemed to be the one possible road to perfection. Hearing of his intention, his mother was seized with dismay. In his book *On the Priesthood* Chrysostom himself gives us a vivid account of the arguments by which at that time his mother was able to dissuade him from his purpose:

At that time the constantly repeated entreaties of my mother prevented me from granting (my friend) the favour for which he asked, or rather from receiving from him that gift. For, when she saw what was in my mind, she took me by my right hand and led me into her own special apartment. There, making me sit down near to her on the bed in which she had borne me, she opened the

floodgates of tears, and added words even more pitiable than her tears. In deep distress she said, "My child, I was not long allowed to enjoy the virtues of your father, such being the will of God. For your birth was followed not long after by his death. Thus you were left an orphan, and I was left a widow before my time—left to bear those sorrows of widowhood which cannot be fully understood except by those who have had to endure them. For no words can suffice to express the storms and tempests of trouble, which come upon a girl, who, having not long before left her father's house and having no experience of business, is suddenly struck by such unbearable sorrow as this, and has to carry a weight of cares too heavy for her age or for her nature. She has to learn to keep lazy servants at their tasks, and to be on the watch for their mischievous ways; to fend off the designs of relatives; to put up patiently with the grasping ways of tax-gatherers, and the rudeness of those who come to collect the rates. Suppose her dead husband has left a child. If it is a girl, she carries heavy responsibility, but at least she is free from heavy expense and from anxiety; but if it is a boy, no day is passed without countless alarms and burdensome anxieties, not to mention the expense she has to bear if she is to bring him up in the manner of a gentleman.

"Yet all these troubles together never persuaded me to enter on a second marriage, or to bring a stepfather into your father's house. I put up with the storms and the trials; I did not try to escape from the iron-furnace of widowhood, relying in the first place on the help that comes from above; but also it was a wonderful consolation to me, in that time of constant hardship, that I was able at all times to see your face, and so to have a living image of my dead husband, an image in all points wonderfully like the original. And so, when you were still a tiny child and had not yet learnt to speak, in that period of life at which children give the greatest pleasure to their parents you were a wonderful consolation to me.

"Nor can you reproach me with having been extravagant

in my widowhood, or with having diminished the inheritance that is due to come to you from your father, through the necessary expenses that resulted from my bereavement—I know that this has happened to many of those who have had the misfortune to be left as orphans. But I have kept the entire inheritance intact. Everything that had to be expended on your proper upbringing I have paid, spending my own money and the dowry which I brought with me from my father's house when I married. Do not think that I am saying this to you by way of reproach. In return for all this I ask of you only one favour—do not plunge me into a second widowhood; do not kindle again the sorrow that time has healed, but wait at least until my death. It may be that you will not have me with you very much longer. For young people look forward to a distant old age; but those of us who are already old have nothing to do but to wait for death.

“So, when you have committed me to the earth and laid me beside the bones of your father, prepare yourself for distant voyages and sail over whatever seas you will. Then there will be no one to prevent you. But, as long as I am alive, accept it as your duty to live with me. Do not resist God, by wantonly and to no purpose bringing such suffering on those who have done you no wrong. If you are entitled to complain that I drag you into secular concerns and compel you to take a part in my worldly affairs, then, disregarding all the claims of the laws of nature, of upbringing, of affection, you may flee from me as an enemy and a conspirator against your welfare. But if in fact I am attending to all this myself, in order that you may have leisure to make your own way through life, let this, if nothing else, tell you that you should not leave me.

“For, though you may say that there are countless others who love you, there is no one else who will provide you with the enjoyment of such liberty as I, since there is no one who cares as I do for your reputation and your standing in the world.”

Such things as these, and more than these, my mother said to me. I reported them to my honourable friend. But he was not at all put out of countenance, and continued to press me even harder, using the same arguments as he had adduced before.<sup>1</sup>

This passage is a rather good example of Chrysostom's writing. There is no reason to doubt that he has reproduced for us fairly accurately what his mother actually said; but it is unlikely that she spoke in quite such carefully modelled and balanced sentences. We can see the trained student of rhetoric at work, skilfully handling his material, and blending words and phrases to produce the best possible effect.

Some time later Chrysostom was able to carry out his designs. He spent six years in the mountains, part of the time in complete solitude, and practised such extremes of self-denial that for the rest of his life he suffered from seriously damaged health. It was probably at this time that he laid the foundations of that amazing knowledge of the text of the Bible, by which he was to be marked in later life.

At the end of this time Chrysostom found it necessary to return to Antioch. He was warmly welcomed by the bishop Meletius, who ordained him deacon in the spring of the year 381. Five years later he was ordained to the priesthood. Then began the greatest period of his ministry. He was constantly in the pulpit, and became the great popular preacher of the day. Crowds flocked to hear him, and the church was always full when he preached. The people hung on his words. Not infrequently, when the preacher reached some climax of his exposition, they would burst out in spontaneous applause in the church—a habit which Chrysostom disliked, and which he did his best, without success, to restrain. He drew out every stop in the organ of pulpit oratory—harsh rebuke, tender appeal, apt illustration from daily life, and always with a copious store of biblical material. The people did not come only to hear his oratory. They knew that the preacher loved

<sup>1</sup> *On the Priesthood* I : 2.

them, and cared for them personally. His words were the expression of a deep spiritual and pastoral concern.

Of Chrysostom's work at this time an ancient writer, Palladius, has written: "For twelve years he was a shining light in the Church of Antioch, lending dignity to the priesthood there by the strictness of his life; some he salted with sobriety, some he illuminated by his teaching, some he refreshed with draughts of the Spirit". A great modern scholar, H. von Campenhausen, has said: "As a theological thinker Chrysostom was neither deep nor original. He was a typical representative of his school, of his Church, and of its ecclesiastical and spiritual ideals. In that already very worldly Church we make the acquaintance of many disappointing bishops. In contrast to them, we can see in Chrysostom what moral and spiritual powers were still alive in the Church. His sermons make plain to us that theology too was still able in that time admirably to fulfil its responsibility for the upbuilding of the Church. The Homilies of Chrysostom are perhaps the only sermons out of the whole legacy of the ancient Greek Church which can still be read as Christian sermons today. They reflect something of the true life of the New Testament, just because they are so moral, so simple and so sober".<sup>1</sup>

Then came a great change in Chrysostom's life. A new bishop was needed for Constantinople. The authorities decided that Chrysostom was the man for the post. They knew that his people in Antioch would be unwilling to let him go; they knew that he might be unwilling to accept so great a task. So Chrysostom was almost kidnapped, and carried away without being asked whether he consented or not.

It is doubtful whether he was ever really happy again. He was now patriarch of the royal city, the greatest Christian city in the world. The Council of Constantinople in 381 had decided that the patriarch of this city, New Rome, was to take the second place in the Christian world, second only to the

<sup>1</sup> *Griechische Kirchenväter* (1956), p. 152.

patriarch of Old Rome, the Pope, a decision that caused fury in the much older Christian city of Alexandria. Previously the bishop's palace had been a centre of social life and entertainment; the bishop was expected to stand in a rather close relationship to the Emperor and his court. But Chrysostom could not change his way of life. He continued to live extremely simply, and gave away generously of the revenues of his see. He threw himself with enthusiasm into the work of preaching, and gathered round him, as at Antioch, an enthusiastic crowd of listeners. But he could not learn to be a diplomat, and inevitably he gave offence.

Chrysostom had high ideals both for the clergy and the laity. He took strong action against bishops and priests who had behaved in a manner unworthy of their calling. He ruthlessly criticized the luxury and ill-living of the rich and worldly. It was hinted that he had even spoken directly against the all-powerful empress Eudoxia. The patriarch Theophilus of Alexandria was watching all the time for an opportunity to injure and perhaps to destroy his rival. He now judged that his time had come. We have no space to go into all the details of the conspiracy. Suffice it to say that in September 401 Theophilus held a Synod "at the Oak" not far from Constantinople for the trial of Chrysostom. All kinds of charges were made against him in his absence, most of them entirely frivolous; the sting came with the charge of treason, that he had used "words offensive to the Empress". The assembled bishops found Chrysostom guilty on sixty-four counts, and declared him deposed from his bishopric. He was arrested and carried away across the Bosphorus.

This was too much for the people of the capital. There was grave danger of a serious rebellion; and just at this moment an earthquake so terrified the superstitious Eudoxia that the sentence against Chrysostom was rescinded, and he was brought back in triumph to his city and his cathedral. For a few months all went well. Then trouble broke out again, and this time it was the end. Five days after Whitsunday 402 the weak Emperor Arcadius was persuaded to pronounce the

sentence of banishment; the patriarch was quietly hurried away to the desolate village of Cucusus in Armenia. Here he was not actually ill-treated; but the harshness of the climate and the loneliness of the place, and even at times actual dangers from the less civilized tribes of the neighbourhood, weighed upon his spirits. And worst of all was the deprivation that he was hardly ever able to preach. As he himself said of himself at an earlier time: "Preaching makes me well; as soon as I open my mouth to speak my weariness is all forgotten".

But this comparatively untroubled exile was not enough to satisfy the vindictive spirit of his enemies. In the heat of summer of the year 407 the order came that he was to move to Pithyus on the Black Sea, in the very remotest corner of the empire. The sick and aged bishop was compelled to make the journey on foot; no regard was paid to his needs, and he was remorselessly exposed alike to burning sun and to rain. The very day before his death he was compelled to march five miles. The halting place for the night was the little town of Komana, where the small Christian community lovingly received him. Next day there was no respite, and he was driven to take the road again. After three miles his strength completely gave way. He was brought back to Komana. There he was robed in white, and for the last time received the Holy Communion. Then, making the sign of the cross, he died, with the words, "Glory be to God for everything. Amen".

These cruelties are a sad comment on the hardness of the age in which the gentle Chrysostom was called to live and to bear witness. But the Lord knows His own. The very names of his persecutors are generally forgotten; Chrysostom is, and always will be, held in honour in all the Churches of the world.

A great many of Chrysostom's writings have been preserved. Apart from other and more theological works, we have no less than six hundred of his sermons and homilies. Each of these would take up about fifteen pages of ordinary print (they must have taken about an hour to deliver) and together they would fill twenty fair-sized volumes. It was his

custom to select a book and work right through it, taking a short passage as the subject of each sermon. Thus we have, for instance, no less than ninety sermons on St. Matthew's Gospel. St. Paul was his favourite, and he preached steadily on almost all the Epistles. He is specially attracted by the moral teaching of St. Paul. He does not show any deep understanding of Paul's tremendous doctrines of law and grace, justification and redemption. But this is characteristic of him; he is above all the preacher of the Christian life; gently and patiently he tries to lead his hearers forward in the way of holiness; they are to learn to reproduce in daily word and action the very life of Christ Himself.

Chrysostom's plan in preaching is almost as different as could be from our modern methods of preaching. Here are no (or very few) sermons on set subjects, with careful division of parts and systematic development of a single theme. Chrysostom works steadily through the chosen passage; he tries to let it speak to himself, and hopes that in this way it will speak to his hearers. He often appears to wander; but in reality he never loses sight of the main theme that he has in hand. The sermon is a real exposition of the word of God; and often that sharp and piercing word will find its target in the hearts of the hearers.

In general Chrysostom seems to have come well prepared to the pulpit. But he is also able quickly to improvise, to take advantage of some situation. The sermon is often conceived as a kind of dialogue with the hearers; the preacher is in touch with them, is quick to feel their mood and to respond to it. It is this that gives life to his preaching; and helps us to realize why it was that crowds came to hear the little, unimpressive man, hung on his words, and felt that what was being imparted to them was the living word of the Lord Himself.

## 1. A SUNDAY HOMILY

### *Chrysostom's 33rd Homily on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*

*Matthew 10 : 16. Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*

#### *(1) Our Lord's commands and their purpose*

We have seen that our Lord gave the disciples assurance that their necessary food would be provided. He gave them the right to enter the houses of all other men. He told them that they were to enter these houses in a rather solemn manner: they were not to come in as vagabonds and beggars; they were to make it plain that their rank was in reality much higher than that of those who were to receive them. This He made clear, when He said to them that "the labourer deserves his food"; when He bade them enquire in each place who was worthy, and having found him to stay with him until they departed from that place; when He told them to give the greeting of peace to those who welcomed them; and when He spoke of the grievous judgment that would fall on those who refused to receive them.

So, having first set them free from every feeling of anxiety, and armed them with the power of working signs, and made them men of iron, indeed of adamant, and liberated them from all worldly affairs and from the ordinary cares of daily life, He then goes on to tell them of the troubles that will come upon them. He does not speak only of the troubles that will befall them in the near future, but also of those that will come only at a much later date. It is His intention to prepare them

in advance and well ahead of time for the warfare that they are to carry on against the devil.

By so doing He achieved a number of important results. In the first place, He enabled the disciples to understand the power of His foreknowledge. In the second place, He made it impossible for anyone to imagine that these terrible troubles came on the disciples because of the weakness of their teacher. Thirdly, He made sure that those who were to endure all these things would not be shaken in their faith through troubles that might come on them unexpectedly and without preparation. Fourthly, He wanted to make sure that, when at the time of His crucifixion He had other and similar words to speak to them, they should not be overwhelmed. Yet this did as a matter of fact occur, as we see from the reproach that He addressed to them: "Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'"<sup>1</sup> And yet so far He has said nothing about His own fate—that He is to be bound and flogged and made away with—so that their minds may not be disturbed by thoughts of this kind; up to this point He has only been telling them in advance of the fate that awaits them in the world.

Then He has another purpose. He wants them to understand that this is a new kind of war to which He is sending them, and that their equipment for it is very strange. He sends them out naked, with only one coat, without sandals, without a staff, without girdle or money-bag. He bids them depend for their food on those to whom they go. And, as though that was not enough, in order to show the unspeakable greatness of His own power He continues, "Go, and show the gentleness of sheep, although you have to go forth against wolves".

<sup>1</sup> Jn. 16:5-6. Note that Chrysostom puts the two sentences in the opposite order to that in which they are found in the Gospel according to St. John.

Indeed, He does not just say “against wolves”; He says “you will have wolves all round you”. More than that; in addition to the gentleness of sheep they are to manifest the innocence of doves. “For so”, He says, “I shall best manifest my power, when sheep get the better of wolves; when, surrounded by wolves on all sides, and mercilessly bitten by them, the sheep not merely are not destroyed but actually transform the wolves. For this is far more wonderful than destroying them—to change their dispositions and to reform their minds. And this you will achieve, though you are only twelve in number, and the whole world is full of wolves about you”

Ought we not to be ashamed, we who do the opposite of what is here commanded, and set on our enemies like wolves? If we behave like lambs, we are victorious; even though ten thousand wolves should hem us in, we survive and overcome. But if we turn ourselves into wolves, we are overcome; for the help of the shepherd is withdrawn from us. For He is the shepherd of sheep and not of wolves. If you have become a wolf, He leaves you and departs; for you have not acted in the way that makes it possible for His power to be seen in you. If, when you are ill-treated, you show gentleness, the whole glory of your victory is attributed to Him; but, if you stand up against your enemy and fight him, the victory is yours to be sure, but the Shepherd is hidden.

## *(2) The weakness of the Apostles and their strength*

Well now, consider what kind of people they were to whom these hard and exacting commands were given. They were timid, very ordinary men; they were ignorant and unlearned. They were in every way inconspicuous. They had had no training in the customs of the Gentiles. They were not the kind of men readily to thrust themselves forward in public assemblies. They were fishermen, tax-gatherers, as imperfect as men could well be. Even the high and mighty

among men might well be troubled, if given commands the like of these; imagine then the shock and dismay they must have caused to these men who were completely untried, and had never lifted their minds to a single noble thought. And yet they were not dismayed. "Well, that is quite natural", someone might say, "seeing that He had given them power to cleanse lepers and to drive out evil spirits". I would be inclined to say that the thing that would most depress them was the very fact that, though they may be engaged in actually raising the dead, these terrible troubles are still to come upon them—law courts and exile and conflicts with all kinds of enemies and being hated by all the world. They will do so many miracles, and yet all these trials lie in wait for them. And what is there, in the midst of all this, to console them? Simply the power of the One who sends them. It is for this reason that, before anything else, He says to them, "Behold, I send you forth. Let this be enough to cheer you. Let this be enough to give you courage, and to keep you from being afraid of any of these things".

Do you see here the authority, the mastery, the word of invincible power? The meaning of what He says is roughly this: "Do not be afraid, even though when I send you out among wolves I tell you to be as sheep and as doves. I could have done the opposite. I could have seen to it that no evil should come near you. Instead of making you as sheep before wolves, I could have made you more terrible than lions. But it is better this way. This way will make you shine more brightly. This will also make my power to be seen". This is just what He says also to Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness".<sup>1</sup> "I", He says, "have appointed this way for you". For when He says, "I send you forth as sheep", He hints at this further meaning:

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. 12 : 9.

“Do not be cast down; for I know that this is the best way by which to make it impossible for anyone to overthrow you”.

Then, in order that they may make some contribution of their own, that all may not appear to be due to grace and to nothing else, and that it may not be supposed that the Crown that is to be given them is given at random and for nothing at all, He goes on “be wise as serpents and innocent as doves”. What can our wits avail in the midst of so many dangers? Indeed, how will it be possible for us to have any wits at all, when we are sunk and drowned beneath so many waves? For, let a sheep be ever so wise, what profit will it have of its wisdom, when it is caught in the midst of wolves—and such wolves too? And let a dove be ever so innocent, what advantage will it have of its innocence, when so many hawks set on it? In the case of creatures without reason, none at all; but in your case, the greatest advantage of all. Let us, then, consider, what wisdom it is that He here requires of us: the wisdom of the serpent. The serpent is prepared to let everything go; it is prepared even to let its body be cut in pieces, and will make no great effort to protect it, if only it may keep its head.<sup>1</sup> So you, He says, must be ready to give up everything—money, your body, even life itself—everything except your faith. For that is the head and that is the root. If that is preserved, you will get everything back, and better than it was before. For this reason he does not tell us just to be simple and guileless, or just wise and prudent; He brings the two together, and the result is just what a Christian ought to be. He prescribes the wisdom of the serpent, so that we shall not be troubled in time of adversity; He appoints the innocence of the dove, that we may learn not to defend ourselves against those who do us wrong, and not to avenge ourselves on those who plot against us.

<sup>1</sup> Chrysostom seems to have held the old belief that, if a snake's head was preserved, it could grow a new body from the head.

Is it possible to imagine anything more stringent than these regulations? Is it not enough to endure suffering? "No", He says, "I do not allow you even to be indignant. For this is what it means to be a dove". It is like casting a straw into the fire, and telling it not to be burned by the fire but rather to put it out. Yes, but let us not be unduly alarmed. Things did work out in the way that the Lord intended, and His will was done. Their works showed that the disciples did become wise as serpents and innocent as doves. And their nature was no different from ours—the same human nature. So let us not think that these commands are impossible for us to obey. The Lord Himself knows better than any other the nature of all things; He knows that fierceness is not overcome by fierceness, but by gentle yielding.

### *(3) The Apostles' obedience in practice*

If you wish to see this actually happening in recorded events, read the book of the Acts of the Apostles. How often the people of the Jews rose up against the apostles, sharpening their teeth against them! The apostles imitated the gentleness of the dove. They made answer with becoming meekness, and by so doing they subdued the anger of the Jews, they quenched their fury, they brought their assault to nothing. For when the Jews said, "We strictly charged you not to speak in this name",<sup>1</sup> though the apostles had the power to do any number of miracles, they gave no rough answer, they did no miracle. They made their defence with the utmost gentleness: "Judge yourselves, whether it is more fitting to obey you or to obey God".<sup>2</sup> You see the innocence of the dove. But now look at the wisdom of the serpent: "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard".<sup>3</sup> You see

<sup>1</sup> Acts 5 : 28.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 4 : 19.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 4 : 20.

how watchful we have to be on every side—not to be discouraged by dangers, and not to be provoked to anger.

It is for this reason that He goes on to say “Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles”.<sup>1</sup> Once again He is teaching them the lesson of self-mastery; in every situation He gives them the privilege of suffering wrong; never does He permit them to inflict wrong on others, in order that you may learn that suffering is itself the victory, and that it is through suffering that He has set up his splendid trophies of triumph. He does not say “Stand up to fight, resist those who come to torment you”; He tells them only that they will have to suffer till the bitter end.

My goodness! What power resides in the word of the Lord! And what calm acceptance on the part of those who heard! Is it not astonishing that his hearers did not quit immediately—those timid men, who had never gone beyond the limits of the lake in which they plied their trade as fishermen? How was it that they did not take thought and say to themselves, “Where in the world then shall we flee? The law courts are against us; the kings are against us, and the governors, and the synagogues of the Jews, the people of the Greeks, rulers and ruled alike”. For He was not telling them only of Palestine, and of the woes that they were there to endure. He goes on to reveal to them the conflicts that await them in other parts of the world. “You shall be brought before kings and governors”, He says, making plain that at a later time He is going to send them to the Gentiles also. “Lord, you have set the whole world at war with us; you have armed all the inhabitants of the world against us, peoples, and rulers and kings”. But what follows is even more terrifying. “You tell us that through us men will

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 10 : 17-18.

become murderers of their brothers and children and fathers—‘Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death’.<sup>1</sup> How, then, will it be possible for the others to believe, when they see children made away with by their parents and brothers by their brethren, and all the world full of abominations? Will they not rather drive us out as though we were avenging demons, men under a curse, destroyers of the civilized world, when they see the world thus filled with the blood of kinsmen, and with murders such as these? A fine kind of peace it will be that we shall be bringing into their houses, when in point of fact we shall be filling them with this kind of slaughter! Even if we were not only twelve but a great company; even if we were not ignorant and unlettered men, but wise men and powerful orators and skilled at speaking; even if we were actually kings with armies and heaps of money—even then, how would we be able to persuade even a few of the truth of our message, when we kindle among them civil wars, yes, and even worse than these? If we so neglect our own safety, is anyone else likely to attend to the message of salvation which we bring?”

Well, actually the disciples neither thought nor spoke in this way; they asked for no guarantees of success in obedience to the Lord’s commands; they simply submitted and obeyed. And this is evidence not only of their courage, but also of the wisdom of their teacher. See how to each of the terrible things of which He tells them He adds a word of consolation. Of those who refuse to receive them He says, “It shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town”.<sup>2</sup> Then, when He speaks of their being led before kings and governors, He adds, “for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles”.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 10 : 21.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 10 : 15.

This is a wonderful consolation—that it is for the sake of Christ that they will endure all this, and that it will turn to judgment on those who condemn them. For, even though everyone else should forsake them God will everywhere make it plain that it is He who has appointed them to this work. He gives them this consolation, not that they are to call for vengeance on their enemies, but that they may have a sure ground for confidence in that they will always have with them Him who foreknew and foretold all these things, and in that they will not really suffer as evil men and destroyers.

Then He goes on to give them another tremendous consolation. He says, “When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you”.<sup>1</sup> This is in order that they may not say, “How shall we be able to persuade others, when all these things come upon us?”; He gives them confidence in the defence that they will be able to make. In another place He says, “I will give you a mouth and wisdom”; here He speaks of the Spirit of the Father dwelling in them; by these words He raises them to the dignity of prophets. So, He first makes plain the greatness of the power that will be given to them; then He goes on to the terrible things—the murders and the slayings—“brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death”. Even that is not the end of it; He goes on to add the most terrible word of all, a word well calculated to shatter a very stone—“You will be hated by all”.<sup>2</sup> But there stands the consolation ready at the doors: “For my name’s sake”, He says, “you will suffer all this”; and then He goes on, “he who endures to the end will be saved”. Surely this thought is

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 10 : 1 -20.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 10 : 2 .

quite enough to put courage into their hearts—that such power is to attend upon their preaching that men will despise the claims of nature, and reject the demands of kinship, and choose in preference to everything else that word that mightily drives all things before it. For, if that power of nature which is so strong in all of us is unable to resist your word but is dissolved and trampled under foot, is there anything else in the world that will be able to prove itself stronger than you? For all that, you will not enjoy a safe and peaceable life, since these things shall be; you will have as your enemies and your opponents all the inhabitants of the world.

#### (4) *The Apostles contrasted with the Greeks*

Where now is Plato? Where is Pythagoras? Where is the crowd of the Stoics? Plato at first enjoyed great honour. Yet he ended by being sold as a slave, and was not able to bring any of his plans to a successful issue, even at the court of a single king. Pythagoras betrayed his disciples and perished miserably. Those miserable Cynics<sup>1</sup> have all passed away like a shadow and a dream. Yet nothing of all that we have so far been recounting ever happened to them. They were famous and well-thought of because of that philosophy which they taught. The Athenians set up in public copies of the letters of Plato, which had been sent them by king Dion. The philosophers spent their whole lives at ease and acquired considerable wealth. At least, they say that Aristippus spent much money on the purchase of harlots. Plato wrote a will in which he distributed a very large amount of property. The disciples of Pythagoras made a bridge of their bodies, and their master walked upon them. They say that Diogenes of Sinope behaved indecently in public in the market-place. This is the kind of fine thing of which they boast.

<sup>1</sup> Literally “those offscourings of the Cynics”.

But among the disciples you will find nothing at all of this kind. Here you find intense sobriety, carefully cultivated order; here war is carried on against the whole world in the cause of truth and godliness—to be slain every day, and only after that to win the splendid trophies of victory.

“But”, say the Greeks, “we had some remarkable generals among us; Themistocles, for example, and Pericles”. But everything that such men have to their credit is no more than child’s play compared to the achievements of these fishermen. Which of their deeds do you wish to refer to? Is it that, when Xerxes was descending upon Greece with his invading hosts, Themistocles persuaded the Athenians to take to their ships? But in this other case it was not Xerxes who descended on these twelve men, but the devil himself with the whole inhabited world and his countless demons; yet not at one single crisis only but throughout their whole lives they withstood him and overcame him. And this they did, not by destroying their opponents, but by changing them and reforming their way of life. For this is the most noteworthy thing of all—that they did not kill or destroy those who plotted against them; but finding them as bad as demons they transformed them that they might be as good as angels; and, freeing man’s nature from that evil tyranny, they chased those destructive demons, the source of endless confusion, out of the streets and out of the houses, and I may even say out of the very wilderness itself. Evidence for this are the companies of monks which they established everywhere, thus cleansing not only the inhabited parts of the world but the uninhabited areas as well.

The most wonderful thing of all is that they did not do all this through meeting their enemies on level terms; they achieved it all through the patient suffering of wrong. For their enemies had them there at their mercy, these twelve unlearned men. They put them in prison, they flogged them,

they drove them from place to place—and yet they could not keep them quiet. You cannot bind a ray of light; it was equally impossible to bind the tongue of the apostles. And the reason for this was that it was not they who spoke, but the power of the Spirit who dwelt in them.

#### *(5) Endurance to the end*

It was thus that Paul overcame Agrippa and his companions, and Nero who surpassed all other men in wickedness. "For", he says, "the Lord stood by me and gave me strength . . . So I was rescued from the lion's mouth".<sup>1</sup> Regard then with admiration the courage with which they heard the Lord's "Be not anxious", and believed and accepted it, and did not shrink in fear from those terrible things of which He spoke. Perhaps you may say that He had given them quite adequate encouragement in the words "It is the Spirit of your Father that speaks". But the thing that I most admire in them is that they did not doubt, and did not ask for any respite from these troubles, though they knew that they would have to endure them not just for two or three years, but for the whole of their lives. And in these words, "He who endures to the end will be saved", He indicates something that is not clearly stated. For it is His will that, in addition to what He Himself supplies, there should also be a contribution from their side. Look back at what we have been studying, and you will be able to see clearly how much comes from the Lord, and how much is the contribution of the disciples. To work miracles is of the Lord; to possess nothing is the part of the disciples. Again, the opening of all doors to them is a work of the grace that comes from above; but to ask for no more than they need is a part of their self-denial—"the labourer deserves his food". The blessing of peace is a gift from God; to seek out

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. 4 : 17.

the worthy, and not to go into every house haphazard, is part of the discipline that he has appointed for them. To punish those who will not receive them is the responsibility of God; to depart courteously from such, without reviling or abusing them, is the gentleness that the disciples are expected to display. To give the Spirit and to set them free from anxiety—that is the work of the Lord; to become like sheep and doves, and to bear all things heroically—this is a sign of the vigour and of the prudence of the disciples. To be hated by others and not to be cast down, but to endure—this is required of the disciples; to save those who have endured—this is the responsibility of the One who sends them. It is for this reason that He says that “he who endures to the end will be saved”.

We see that many who are strong in the beginning of an affair later grow weary; it is for this reason that He says “I am looking to the end”. For what is the use of seeds that flourish in the beginning of their growth, but a little later wither? So He requires of them patience that will be resolute to the end. In order that no one may say that it was after all the Lord who did everything, and that there is nothing really surprising in their achievement since what they had to suffer was not in actual fact so very terrible, He tells them plainly that they will have need of patience. “For”, he says, “even though I deliver you from the first dangers that come upon you, I reserve you for others harder to bear than these; and after those will come yet others; and as long as you breathe there will be no end to the assaults that men will make upon you”. This is the hidden meaning of His words: “He who endures to the end will be saved”. Here He says “Do not be anxious how you are to speak”; in another place He says “Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you”.<sup>1</sup> So, when the argument is as between friends,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. 3 : 15.

He bids us take thought for ourselves; but when we are face to face with a fearful court of law, and a raging people, and fear on every side, then He throws His own weight into the scale, in order that we may have courage, and speak, and not be amazed or betray the righteous cause. For it is surely astonishing that these men, who had plied their craft as fishermen, or as tanners, or as tax-gatherers, when brought in alone and bound, with downcast face, to the place where the rulers are seated in judgment, with governors standing by, and the armed guards with bared swords and crowds surrounding them, should venture even so much as to open their mouths. And in fact those judges were generally unwilling to allow them to speak or to make any defence on behalf of that faith which they held; they wished to go ahead without delay to the business of torturing them to death, as the common offscourings of the world. "For", say they, "these men who have turned the world upside down have come here also",<sup>1</sup> and "they are acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is a king named Jesus Christ".<sup>2</sup>

Everywhere the law courts were prejudiced by suspicions of this kind; and the disciples needed a great measure of that help that comes from above, if they were to prove both these things—first that the doctrine, on behalf of which they are ambassadors, is true; and secondly that they are in no way hostile to the established laws. For, if they go too far in the defence of the doctrine, they may easily fall under suspicion of subverting the laws; and, if they go too far in showing that they have no intention of upsetting the established order, they may easily fail to defend the doctrine in its fulness. You can see, in the case of Peter and Paul and of all the others, how splendidly they kept the whole time to the true line of defence. Everywhere in the world they were accused of

<sup>1</sup> Acts 17 : 6.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 17 : 7.

sedition, of favouring revolution and disorder. They repelled all such suspicions, and they actually made for themselves exactly the contrary claim, proclaiming themselves to be the saviours and helpers and benefactors of all. And all this they accomplished through their great patience. For this reason Paul says, "I die daily"; and so, be the perils what they may, he remains steadfast to the end.

#### (6) *Admonitions to Christians*

What shall we be worth then, if, having such examples before us, we grow soft and remiss even in time of peace? We are slain, though there is no war; we faint, though no one pursues us; we are bidden to take hold of our salvation in peace, and even of this we are incapable. In their time the whole world was on fire, and the flames were taking hold in every place; yet they went in and snatched those who were being burned from the very heart of the flames—and you are not able even to protect yourself!

What defence of ourselves shall we be able to make? What excuses can we present? Here are no whips, no prisons, no judges, no mobs of people assembled against us. There is nothing of the kind; on the contrary, it is we who are rulers and in power. The emperors are pious. Honours have been heaped on Christians. Christians are given precedence and marks of distinction and immunities—yet even so we are unable to maintain ourselves as Christians. They were led away every day to judgment, teachers and pupils alike; they could show countless bruises and wounds without end, and yet they regarded themselves as happier than those who enjoy the blessings of paradise; and we who do not have to endure any of these things even in imagination are softer than wax.

"But", someone will say, "they were able to work miracles". Did that save them from being flogged? Did that save them

from being driven into exile? And the tragedy of it all is that so often they were ill-treated by the very ones to whom they had done good; but, even when they received evil in exchange for good, they were not dismayed. But you, if you have rendered someone some little service, and get in return unkindness instead of thanks, you are distressed, you are upset, you may even regret having done the other man the good turn.

Well now, suppose that war and persecution of the Church were to break out—God forbid that it should ever be so—think of the ridicule and the reproaches of which we should be in danger. And very justly. For if a man never strips for exercise in the sports ground, how will he ever be distinguished in the games? If an athlete has never troubled to find a trainer, is it likely that he will be able to put up a good show against his opponent, when summoned to the Olympic games? Ought we not to be training ourselves every day in wrestling and boxing and running? Look at the experts in the pentathlon.<sup>1</sup> When they have no opponent, they fill a bag with a heavy weight of sand, hang it up, and try their full strength upon it. The younger athletes practice on the bodies of their comrades the attack that one day they will have to launch on their opponents. Let this be a challenge to you. Practise yourself in the discipline of the true religion. You see many Christians unable to resist the paroxysms of anger, and others set on fire by the flame of lust. Practise resistance against such passions; bear courageously the trials of the spirit, that you may be able also to bear bravely those of the body.

#### *(7) Old Testament examples*

Consider the blessed Job. If he had not been well trained before the time of conflict, he would not have shown up so

<sup>1</sup> The five-fold event of jumping, running, throwing the discus, throwing the javelin and wrestling.

splendidly when the conflict came. If he had not trained himself to stand up to every kind of misfortune, he would certainly have let fall some unseemly word, when he received the news of the death of his children. But, as it is, we see him endure patiently a steady stream of disasters—the loss of his goods, the destruction of so much property, bereavement of his children, the commiseration of his wife, the plagues that befell his body, the reproaches of his friends, and the hard words of his servants. If you wish to understand how he had trained himself, listen to him as he speaks of the low esteem in which he had held money. “If I have rejoiced because my wealth was great”,<sup>1</sup> “if I have piled up gold as though it were dust, if I have put my trust in precious stones”.<sup>2</sup> So he was not greatly troubled, when his wealth was taken away from him, since he did not greatly desire it when he had it. Consider his attitude towards his children; he did not bring them up over-softly as we do, but required of them a strict reckoning. He offered sacrifice, in case they might have committed sins of which he knew nothing; think, then, what a stern judge he would have been, in any case in which actual sins came to light. As regards the sobriety of his life, and the wrestling by which he maintained it, listen to his remarks on this subject: “I made a covenant with mine eyes that I should not look upon a virgin”.<sup>3</sup> This explains how it came about that his wife was not able to break down his resolution; before the troubles came upon him he had loved her—not beyond measure, but as it is fitting that a man shall love his wife.

I wonder how the devil ever took it into his head to attack Job, knowing him to be so well trained to resist. How then, did it occur to him to attack a man like Job? The devil is

<sup>1</sup> Job 31 : 25.

<sup>2</sup> Job 31 : 24—but Chrysostom seems to be quoting from memory.

<sup>3</sup> Job 31 : 1.

a stubborn beast, and never gives up hope. And this is the heaviest condemnation that rests upon us—that the devil never despairs of finding a way to destroy us, and we despair of our own salvation. Now look at the way in which Job had trained himself to endure bodily sickness and distress. He had never had to endure anything of this kind before; he had passed the whole of his life in wealth and luxury, and in the comfort that goes with them—but his imagination had dwelt anxiously on the sufferings of others. He himself says this quite clearly: “The thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me”;<sup>1</sup> and again, “I wept for everyone in trouble, and grieved on seeing a man in sore straits”.<sup>2</sup> For this reason none of those troubles could disturb him, great and intolerable as they were. Do not tell me of the loss of his money, and the bereavement of his children, nor of the sickness that would not be healed, nor of the words by which his wife tried to lead him astray. I point to things that were far harder than these to bear.

What in the world could be harder than all this to bear? Alas, when we read the story, we learn no more than is evident on the surface. Because we are asleep, we do not learn; but he who meditates, and seeks eagerly for the pearl of price, will come to know far more important things than these. For the things that were really hard to bear, and likely to cause him far greater distress of mind, were very different from the obvious sufferings. In the first place, he had no clear knowledge of the kingdom of heaven and of the resurrection. That is why he cries out in sorrow: “I shall not live for ever, so that I should hold on in endurance”.<sup>3</sup> The second cause is that he was aware of much good that he had done; the third that he was not aware of any evil in himself; the fourth the idea that all

<sup>1</sup> Job 3 : 25.

<sup>2</sup> Job 30 : 25.

<sup>3</sup> Job 7 : 16. This quotation differs widely from the Hebrew.

this came to him from the hands of God. (Even if he had realized that it all came from the devil, that in itself was quite enough to cause him perplexity.) The fifth was that he had to bear so many reproaches and accusations from his friends. "For", they say, "you are not scourged as you have deserved".<sup>1</sup> Sixthly, he saw men of evil life prospering and making fun of him. Seventhly, he had no example before him of anyone who had suffered as much as he.

If you want to understand how heavily all these things weighed upon Job, contrast his situation with that in which we Christians now find ourselves. We look forward to the coming of a kingdom. We have a sure hope of the resurrection, and of good things which no tongue can utter. Our conscience tells us of all the many sins that we have committed. We have innumerable examples to look to. We have been carefully brought up in the Christian way. Yet some of us, if we lose some small sum of money—and very likely money that we have wrongly obtained—feel that life simply is not worth living. We have not a wife who is hard on us; we have not suffered the loss of our children; we have no friends who reproach us, or servants who plot against us; we have, in fact, many who encourage us, either by word or by deed. That being so, how are we to calculate the honour that that man deserves, who lost in a moment and by chance all the wealth that had been built up by his own honest toil, who then endured numberless storms of trial, and stood steadfast through it all, and rendered up to the Master the thanksgiving for all these things that was due?

If we take no account of anything else, the words of his wife alone were enough to shake the constancy of a stone. See the evil cunning with which she sets to work. She does not mention the money or the camels or the sheep or the oxen

<sup>1</sup> Job 11 : 6.

(she knows how well schooled Job is to bear the loss of all these); she takes hold of that which is far harder to bear, I mean the loss of his children; she enlarges upon the tragedy, and adds something on her own account.

Even in time of prosperity, when nothing untoward has happened, women have often and in many ways persuaded men to their hurt. Consider then the strength of Job's resolution.

For there are many who have controlled desire, and yet have yielded to pity. For instance, there was that noble Joseph, who successfully resisted the tremendous power of sexual desire, and repulsed that wicked woman, for all the countless wiles with which she came against him; yet he could not hold out against the power of tears, but when he saw the brothers who had wronged him, he was overcome by emotion, and, unable any longer to wear the mask, told them plainly who he was. But, when the tempter is a man's wife, and says things that are likely to stir pity, and has the situation working in her favour, and the wounds, and the bruises, and the countless waves of disaster, if a man does not yield to such a storm of emotion, are we not entitled to say that his resolution is stronger than adamant?

#### *(8) The Christian hope and consolation*

Allow me to say boldly that, if this blessed Job was not greater than the apostles, at least he was no less than they. For they had as consolation the fact that it was for Christ they suffered. And the medicine that was able to raise them up every day was this—that at every point the Master put in such words as—“on my account”; and “for my sake”; and “if they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub”. But poor Job had none of this consolation—neither that which came from the miracles, nor that which came from grace. Nor had he the same power of the Spirit. That which we saw in the case of the apostles to be the most painful thing of all—

the being hated by friends and servants and enemies and by those who had received good at their hands—all this Job also had to endure; but he was not able to see the sacred anchor, the calm haven, the “For my sake” spoken by the Saviour.

I am lost in admiration also for the three young men, and for the way in which they endured the furnace, when they withstood the king. Hear what they say: “We will not serve your gods, or worship the image which you have set up”.<sup>1</sup> For them the great consolation was that they knew quite certainly that it was for the sake of God that they suffered all that came upon them. But Job did not know that all his sufferings were sent him by God, as opportunities for wrestling and for training in virtue. If he had known this, he would have had little difficulty in putting up with all that he had to endure. When he heard the Lord say, “Do you think that I used you for any other purpose than that your righteousness should appear?”,<sup>2</sup> see what power this single word has to revive him. See how he humbles himself; he is prepared almost to forget all that he has suffered, and says, “Why am I yet judged, being admonished and instructed by the Lord, hearing such things as these, I who am as nothing?”<sup>3</sup> And again, he says, “Until now I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye has seen thee; therefore I have humbled myself and repent, and regard myself as dust and ashes” (Job 42 : 5-6). So let us who live after the coming of the law and grace emulate the courage and the gentleness of this man, who lived before the coming of law and grace, in order that with him we may attain to the everlasting dwelling-place; to which may it be granted to us all to come, through the grace and loving kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and might for ever and ever. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Dan. 3 : 18.

<sup>2</sup> Job 40 : 8—but not as in the Hebrew.

<sup>3</sup> Job 40 : 4; nearly, but not quite, according to the Greek translation.

## 2. ON THE STATUES

### *Introduction*

It was the year 387. The Emperor Theodosius, as is the way of rulers, was in need of money. Taxation was already heavy, and now a new and heavy levy was to be laid on those who thought that the burden of the taxes was already heavier than they could bear. It was 26 February. The "letters about gold" had arrived in Antioch. Men were sullen and angry. They said, "Our life is not worth living; the city will be ruined". The fury of the mob steadily increased, and gradually broke the bonds of control. Men stormed into the hall of justice and threw stones at the pictures of the Emperor and of members of his family. Next, the bronze statues were attacked; the statues of the Emperor's father, of his dearly loved wife Flaccilla, and of the Emperor himself, were insulted, thrown to the ground or dragged about the streets.

This was a very serious matter indeed. Just about this time St. Ambrose had written, "Whoever treats the Emperor's statue with contempt is considered to have injured the Emperor himself". The Emperor was regarded as almost divine. The whole empire depended on him and his "good-fortune". To do anything to injure him was of itself high treason. It could be considered also as blasphemy, since it touched the anointed of God. And the Emperor was absolute sovereign; in such a situation it would be generally recognized that he had the right to take unlimited vengeance.

The riot was very soon suppressed. But then the city entered on an agonizing period of waiting and anxious expectation. What would the Emperor do? Theodosius

was a Christian, and a man of many virtues; but his temper was impetuous, and liable to break out in violent anger which it was then very difficult to bring under control. A few years later, in 390, an outburst of his anger caused the death of about 7,000 people in the city of Thessalonica.

Chrysostom, who had not long before been ordained priest, took advantage of the opportunity to preach a series of twenty-one sermons "On the Statues", to calm the people, to help them to face their ordeal with courage, and to stir them to penitence and to greater devotion in their Christian faith. The fourth of these sermons was preached on the first day of Lent.

The imperial commissioners arrived in the following week. So great was the terror caused by their arrival that Antioch was like a city of the dead. Many had fled from the city, and hardly anyone was willing to be seen in the streets. Then followed a day of utmost anguish. The commissioners were determined to get to the bottom of the affair. Torture and the lash were freely applied to extort evidence. As evening fell, men who had held high office in the city were led forth in chains, some to death and some to imprisonment. Men felt that that which they most dreaded had come to pass—the greatest city of the East was doomed to total destruction.

The following day a striking change took place. Monks and hermits streamed into the city from the mountains. They prevailed on the commissioners to permit an appeal to be made to the Emperor. The bishop of the city, Flavian, though an old man, had already set out on the arduous journey to Constantinople, to present the petition of the people to the Emperor. He went, and he was successful. The joyful tidings of pardon reached the city some time between April 16 and 25; and the citizens were able to celebrate their Easter in joy and tranquillity.

The extracts we have translated bring before us some of the

most dramatic moments in these two terrible months. We see how, in those days, the pulpit exercised very much the function of our daily papers, giving people the latest news, and commenting on it as leading articles in the papers do today. It is only with the invention of the printing press and popular education that the pulpit has lost this function. Chrysostom can never forget that he is an orator. Even in sermons delivered at such a time of crisis, he uses all the arts of rhetoric to heighten his effects. It is hardly likely that Bishop Flavian, in the presence of the Emperor, delivered quite so carefully balanced and rhetorically correct an address as is here put into his mouth. But Chrysostom was a child of his time; that age attached great importance to oratory, and insisted that everything must be duly expressed in just the proper way. And it is important to look beyond what, from our point of view, are certain defects of taste to the immense service that Chrysostom rendered in those days to the people of Antioch. He is a true pastor. He shares the sorrows and anxieties of his people. He knows how to comfort them. He offers no shallow message of good cheer—all the time he is lifting the thoughts of his hearers to God who is there all the time in the shadows, who even in this time of affliction has not forgotten His people, and is ordering all things for their good. Thus Chrysostom helped them to live through the time of trial until the day of the great deliverance dawned. It is no wonder that they took him to their hearts, and always regarded him with the utmost love and veneration.

In the whole literature of the ancient world there are few more dramatic stories than this of the rebellion at Antioch and its consequences. Here we are listening to the voice of one who had actually lived through the events and commented on them day by day. As we read Chrysostom *On the Statues*, we feel as though we ourselves were taking part in events that happened nearly sixteen hundred years ago.

*Part of Sermon 13*

Today I will take the same starting-point, and make the same preface, as yesterday and the day before. I say now again, as then, "Blessed be God". Think of our state on Wednesday a week ago; think of the happy state in which we find ourselves today. What a tempest lay upon us then! What calm we enjoy today!

For it was on that day that the terrible tribunal was set up in our city, and caused the hearts of all of us to tremble, and made the day no better than the night, not that the light of the sun had failed but that despair and fear had darkened your eyes.

So, that we may enjoy to the full the relief that has been granted to us, I propose to go briefly through the story of what happened. I am of the opinion that this narrative will be profitable both to us and to all that are to come after us. When those who have escaped from shipwreck come safely to their haven, it gives them pleasure to remember the waves and the storm and the winds. And when those who have been sick get better, they enjoy telling others of those fevers by which they had been brought to the very gates of death. So, when danger is past, it gives pleasure to narrate the danger, since the mind is no longer possessed by fear, and through speaking of the dangers is able to enjoy the sense of deliverance to the full. For the memory of dangers that are past always throws into fuller relief the beauty of the calm that has succeeded them.

At that time most of the people of the city had fled in terror before the impending menace, to the deserts and ravines and hidden refuges, fear driving them out in every direction. The houses were empty of women, the streets were empty of men. It was hardly possible to see two or three walking together, and those that there were looked like the living dead going about the streets. I went to the place of

judgment to see the end of the affair, and there I found assembled all that was left of the people of the city. The most remarkable thing of all was that, though such a crowd had come together, the silence was as deep as though not a single person had been present; all were looking one upon the other, but no one ventured to put a question or to expect an answer. Everyone suspected his neighbour, since so many had been caught up without any warning from the open street, and taken inside the judgment hall. We all, as of one mind, lifted our eyes to heaven, and raised our hands in silence waiting for the help that comes from above. We pleaded with God to stand by those who were on trial and to strengthen them, and so to soften the hearts of the judges that the sentence pronounced by them might be mild. And like people on the shore watching those who are wrestling with shipwreck, and finding no way to come to them or to stretch out a hand to help or to aid them in their distress, since the stormy waves are between, unable to do anything but stand far away on the shore, stretching out their hands and weeping, and crying aloud to God to help those who are being buffeted by the waves; so we all stood in silence and called upon God in our hearts, pleading with Him to stretch out His hand to help those who in this trial were in peril of another kind of shipwreck, and not to permit the boat to be swallowed up by the waves and the judgment to end in the total shipwreck of those who were under trial.

All this was happening outside the doors. But when I went within the judgment hall, the sight that met our eyes was even more terrifying. For there we saw soldiers armed with swords and clubs, guarding the judges against any kind of disturbance. For all those related to the accused—wives and mothers and daughters and fathers—were standing close to the doors of the judgment hall. And, to make sure that, if one of the accused was led away under sentence of death,

none of the watchers, cut to the heart by the sight of this tragedy, should cause any kind of turmoil or confusion, the soldiers kept them at a considerable distance, and by their menaces made sure that they would give no expression to their feelings.

The most pitiable sight of all was that of the mother and sister of one of the accused, who lay close to the very door of the chamber where the judges were in session, grovelling on the floor, their faces covered, a spectacle to all those who were standing around them. No servant was with them, no neighbour or friend, and none of their relations; there they were alone, in the cheapest of garments, in the midst of such a crowd of soldiers, prostrate on the ground at the doors. I think that their state was even more pitiable than that of those whose case was being tried. They could hear the voices of the executioners, the sound of the lash, the agonized cries of those who were being flogged, the terrible threats of the judges. Every time the lash fell, I think that they suffered even worse agony than those who were being flogged. For the danger was that the evidence extorted from these might be held to prove the guilt of others against whom accusation had been laid. So, when they heard the cries of one who was being flogged in order to make him reveal the names of the guilty, they looked up to heaven and prayed God to give him strength and endurance, lest the safety of one who was dear to them might be betrayed by this other, through his inability to bear the bitter agony of the stripes.

I think their situation was like that of those who have been caught in a storm. Sometimes they see at a distance a great wave rising in a crest, and growing gradually higher, and clearly preparing to swamp their boat; before it reaches them, they are ready to die of fear. Just so these women, when they heard the cries and screams from within, were afraid that those from whom evidence was being extorted might

yield to the stress of the torments and denounce one of those who was dear to them, and saw as it were a thousand deaths before their very eyes. And so within was torment, and without was torment. Inside the executioners tormented the accused; outside these women were tormented by the strength of their natural affections, and by the sympathy that was in their hearts. Within were lamentations, and without were lamentations; inside, of those who were under examination; outside, of their nearest and dearest friends.

Not only so. The very judges suffered deeply in their hearts. Perhaps their sufferings were the worst of all, since they were compelled to be the ministers of such a bitter tragedy. I myself was sitting there and saw all this. I saw how these matrons and maidens, who up till now had lived a sheltered life, made of themselves a common spectacle to the eyes of all. Those who were accustomed to lie on soft couches now had the pavement for a couch. Those who were accustomed to every kind of attention from maidservants and male attendants, and to the enjoyment of every luxury, now had nothing of the kind, but lay there at the feet of all, pleading with each one to give his meed of help to those who were on trial, so that there might be, as it were, a common contribution of pity. And when I saw all this, I said to myself in the words of Solomon, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity". And in what was there happening I saw the fulfilment of this other word of Scripture which says "All the glory of man is as the flower of grass; the grass is withered, the flower has faded".<sup>1</sup> For in this crisis wealth and high birth and ostentation and the company of friends and kinship—all this was tested, and shown to be of no avail, since such human support had no power to help in the face of the evil and wickedness that had been committed. When a sparrow's nest has been robbed of

<sup>1</sup> Isa. 40 : 6-7.

the young, and the mother-bird comes and finds the nest empty, she cannot rescue the young; but shows the depths of her distress by fluttering about the hands of the fowler. Just so, these women, whose children had been snatched from their homes and caught up in the court-house like creatures in a net or snare, could not come near and rescue their captive children, yet in the same way they showed the depth of their sorrow by prostrating themselves near the doors of the prison, and raising a great crying and lamentation, and trying to approach the hunters who had captured the children.

When I saw all this, I began to think of that other dreadful judgment seat; and I said to myself, "Here it is men who sit as judges; yet neither father nor mother nor sister nor any other can deliver those who are under trial, even though they may be innocent of the crimes that have been committed. If that is so here, who shall be able to stand by us, when we appear to be judged before the dreadful judgment seat of Christ? Who will be bold enough then to speak a word on our behalf? Who will be able to deliver those who are being led away to those unbearable punishments?" Those who were being judged in this assize were among the first men in our city, members of our best and highest families. And yet they would have been happy to lose everything, even freedom itself, in exchange for one single privilege—that of being allowed to go on living in this world.

(Homily 13 : 1-2)

### *Part of Sermon 17*

We were expecting countless evils. We thought that we should be dispossessed of all our possessions, that the houses of the city would be burned with all their inhabitants, that the city would be erased from existence in the world, that its very ruins would be destroyed, and that the site on which it stood would be ploughed up. But all this remained a matter of

mere expectation; none of it actually came to pass. And this is the most wonderful thing of all—God did not merely deliver us from this terrible danger; he poured great benefits upon us; he added glory to our city; through this time of trial and disaster he raised our credit higher than it had ever stood before. I will now record how all this came about.

When the commissioners sent by the Emperor to hold an enquiry into these events had set up that terrible tribunal, and had summoned to trial all those who had in any way been involved in the crimes, and we were in expectation of various kinds of death, the hermits who dwell on the high ridges of the mountains revealed the true quality of their manner of life.<sup>1</sup> For many years they had lived apart in their seclusion; but now, though no one had called them and no one had so advised them, seeing this great cloud of disaster hanging over the city they left their caves and their huts, and ran together from every quarter, as it were a host of angels descending from the heavens. And indeed the appearance of the city at that time was like heaven, with so many holy men appearing everywhere in it, and by their very appearance giving confidence to those who were in distress, and helping them to bear with equanimity the disasters that had befallen them. For who, seeing these men, would not learn to laugh at death? Who would not learn to think lightly of life?

This was only the first of the marvels. The next was that these men entered the presence of the judges, and boldly appealed to them on behalf of the accused. They said that they were all ready to shed their own blood, and to lose their own heads, if only they might be allowed to deliver the captives from the calamity that seemed ready to fall upon them. And they affirmed that they would not desist from their

<sup>1</sup> Chrysostom's word is "philosophy"—Christian holiness is the true and divine wisdom.

appeal, until the judges either agreed to spare the people, or consented to send them, together with the accused, as a delegation to the Emperor. "Theodosius", they said, "the Emperor of all the world, is a believer, a man who leads a godly life. We shall certainly be able to persuade him to be merciful. We do not authorize or permit you to stain the sword with blood or to sever a single head. If you do not agree to postpone sentence, we will certainly all die with them. The crimes committed were terrible; that we frankly admit; but great as was this lawlessness the human kindness of the Emperor is even greater". We hear that another of them spoke a word full of shrewd wisdom: "The statues which had been thrown down have been put back in their places and have resumed their accustomed appearance; in a very short time what was wrong has been put right. But, if you destroy the image of God, how will you ever be able to put right the wrong that you have done? Will you be able to bring dead men back to life? Will you be able to bring back the souls to the bodies?" They also spoke to them at great length about the judgment of God.

Who could fail to be astonished, to be lost in admiration for the character of these men? When the mother of one of the accused, baring her head and exposing her grey hairs, caught hold of the horse of one of the judges by the bridle, and ran with him through the open street, and so entered into the judgment hall, we were all amazed, we were lost in admiration of her love and her courage. Ought we not to be far more amazed at the actions of these men? For there would be no such great cause for astonishment, if such a mother had given her life for her son. The force of nature is very great, and the love of a mother for the son that she herself has borne is irresistible. But these men showed such love for those whom they had not begotten or brought up, whom they had never seen or heard of or encountered, that, even if they had had ten

thousand lives, they would have been willing to surrender them all in order to deliver the accused from death.

Now, do not reply that they were not actually put to death, and did not in actual reality shed their blood; or that the boldness with which they spoke before the tribunal was only such as was natural to men who had already renounced their own lives, and that it was with this understanding that they came down from the mountains to the judgment hall. For, unless they had resolutely prepared themselves in advance for every kind of death, they would not have been able to use such freedom of speech to the judges and to manifest so notable a degree of courage. They remained sitting before the doors of the judgment hall all day long, ready to snatch from the very hands of the executioners those who might be led out to die. Where now are those who ostentatiously wore the philosopher's cloak, and grew their beards long, and carried a staff in their right hand, those worthless Cynics, those philosophers in outward show, whose behaviour was worse than that of the dogs under the table, who were prepared to do anything for the sake of their bellies? All at that time had left the city; they had sped away, and hidden themselves in caves. And only those who by their works showed what philosophy truly is walked without fear through the open streets, as though no cloud of danger hung over the city. So those who dwelt in the city fled away to the mountains and the deserts, and the dwellers in the desert came into the city, thus showing by their deeds what they had previously affirmed constantly in word, that not even a furnace of fire can harm the man who lives virtuously. So great is this philosophy, which is far superior to all other things, and rises above the chances of good and evil fortune; for it is not puffed up by prosperity, and is not cast down or discouraged by adversity, but keeps an even balance at all times, thus manifesting its own intrinsic strength and power.

Who was there who was not convicted of weakness by the painful circumstances of that time? Those who held the first positions in the city, men of rank and power, those who had boundless wealth and ready access to the Emperor, all left their houses and fled away to the wilderness, taking counsel only for their own safety. All friendship and kinship was then tested and found wanting. In this time of disaster men refused to recognize those whom previously they had known quite well, and preferred not to be recognized by them. But these hermits, poor men who possessed nothing more than a single cheap garment, who had lived in rustic surroundings, men who previously had been little regarded, dwelling in mountains and ravines, now manifested the strength of lions; with high and lofty courage they stood forth in the midst, at a time when all were trembling and cowering from fear; they dispelled the cloud of disaster; and this they achieved not by long and painful effort, but as it were in the twinkling of an eye. The greatest and most mighty warriors do not need to enter into close conflict with their adversaries; if they appear in armed array and shout their warcry, that is enough to put their enemies to flight. So in one single day these men came down, conferred, relieved disaster, and went back to their own dwelling place. So wonderful is the way of life, the philosophy, that has been taught by Christ to men.

And what shall I say of the eminent men, those who were in a position to exercise authority? When the commissioners, who had received from the Emperor the highest authority to enquire into this affair, were appealed to by the hermits to exercise clemency and to let their judgment be tempered by mercy, they replied that their authority did not go so far as this; when the Emperor had been insulted, to release without punishment those who had insulted him might be regarded as compounding the insult, and this would be fraught with grave danger for themselves. But the monks were simply

unwilling to take No for an answer. With their high-minded opportunity they besieged the judges, and in the end so put them to shame that they were willing to take the risk of going beyond the authority which they had received from the Emperor. They were able to persuade the judges, even though the guilt of the guilty had been proved, not to proceed to pronounce sentence upon them, but to refer the matter to the Emperor for his final decision. They undertook with absolute confidence to persuade the Emperor to pardon those who had offended him, and they themselves were ready at once to set off for the capital city. In admiration for the courage of the hermits, the judges manifested the highest respect for them. But they would not agree to their undertaking this long journey. They said that the words of the monks should be recorded, and that they themselves would make the journey to the capital and prevail upon the Emperor to lay aside all anger. We confidently expect that they will be successful in the attempt.

So, while the trial was still in progress, the hermits went in, and set forth their opinions at great length; they used every possible argument that might persuade the Emperor; they reminded him of the last judgment, and affirmed that they would be ready to lay down their own lives, if he did not accede to their request. The judges had their words taken down in writing, and then for the time being dissolved the court. This will be an adornment to our city richer than any crown. For the Emperor will hear what has happened here. The capital will hear, the whole inhabited world will hear, that the hermits of Antioch are men of apostolic courage. And when these letters are read at court, everyone will be amazed at their nobility; everyone will congratulate our city, and thus we shall be able to wipe away the evil repute into which we have come. And everyone will come to understand that these crimes were the work not of citizens of the city,

but of strangers of depraved character. And the evidence of the hermits will be quite sufficient testimony to vindicate the character of our city.

(Homily 17 : 1-2)

Very shortly after the sedition had broken out, and before the arrival of the commissioners, the aged Bishop Flavian set out for Constantinople to intercede with the Emperor. As is here recorded, he was successful, and Theodosius sent him back to Antioch with the joyful tidings of pardon.

### *Part of Sermon 21*

So although, when (Bishop Flavian) set out from the city, he left all of us in a state of great despondency, the sufferings he had to endure were worse than those that we were enduring here at the very heart of the crisis. For, when he had made half the journey, he met the commissioners who had been sent by the Emperor, and learned the terms of the mission that had been entrusted to them. And when he thought of the terrible fate that awaited the city—the tumults, the confusions, the flight, the fear, the agony, the perils—it was as though his very heart had broken, and the floodgates of his tears were opened; for it is always the case that the sufferings of parents are greatly increased when they cannot stand by their children in their time of trouble. And this we can see in the experience of our bishop, a most tender-hearted man; for the cause of his lamentation was not simply the troubles that he saw coming on the city, but also the fact that he was so far from us in our time of trouble. But even this was overruled as a means of deliverance for us. For, when he had learned from the commissioners of the errand on which they were bent, he was moved to even deeper lamentation; he betook himself to God in earnest supplication, and spent sleepless nights pleading with

Him to stand by our city in its time of trial, and to turn the mind of the Emperor to clemency.

When he reached the capital and entered the royal palace, he stood at a distance from the Emperor, speechless, weeping, with downcast eyes, swathed in his cloak, as though it had been he who had committed all these crimes. His purpose in taking up this humble posture, this mournful aspect, this tearful stance, was to work on the mind of the Emperor, and even before beginning his speech in our defence to incline his heart to mercy. For, when we have done wrong, the only hope of pardon is in keeping silence, in saying not a word in defence of the wrong that has been done. His aim was to remove one feeling from the mind of the Emperor and to introduce another; to quench wrath, and to produce tranquillity, and thus to prepare the way for the speech in our defence which he was about to make. And in this purpose he was successful.

You will remember that, after the people of Israel had sinned their terrible sin, Moses went up into the mountain and remained speechless before God, until God had finished His indictment of His people with the words, "Let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them, and I may consume them".<sup>1</sup> This is just what our bishop did.

When the Emperor saw him standing thus weeping and with downcast mien, he came up to him; and the effect of our bishop's tears was manifest in the words with which he addressed him. For his attitude was not one of anger or of indignation, but rather of pain; not of wrath, but rather of dejection, and of a deep sense of inner distress. You will understand this perfectly, when you hear the actual words of the Emperor. He did not say, "What is this? You come to me as an envoy on behalf of these wicked, utterly wicked men,

<sup>1</sup> Ex. 32 : 10.

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who are totally unfit to live; these violent revolutionaries, for whom no punishment could be too severe?" He said nothing of the kind. On the contrary, he spoke, as though defending himself, with the utmost respect, and out of deep sorrow of mind. He enumerated all the benefits that he had conferred on our city from the beginning of his reign until now. And after each item, he asked, "Was it fair that I should receive such a reward as this for what I had done for them? What injustice had I done that they should avenge themselves on me in this way? What accusation, great or small, could they bring against me, and not only against me but also against those who are now dead, that they should insult us so? For they could not be satisfied merely to wreak their anger on the living; that nothing might be lacking to their wanton insolence, they felt it necessary to attack those who are dead and buried. Let us suppose that I have done them wrong, as they imagine. Could they not have spared the dead, who could have had no responsibility for these wrongs—for they will hardly go so far as to blame them for them! Is it not the fact that I have always shown Antioch the highest honour, that I have preferred it even before the city in which I was born, that it has always been my great desire to visit that city, and that I have made public declaration of my desire?"

At this point our bishop groaned deeply, and began to weep even more bitterly. He could no longer keep silence, for he saw that the Emperor's defence of himself had added even greater weight to the charges against us. Groaning deeply in spirit he began:

"Your majesty, we fully admit the love which you have shown our city. It is quite impossible that we should deny it. And this it is which has made our sorrow so profound—that evil demons have bewitched this city, the object of so much love, that we have seemed ungrateful to our benefactor, and provoked to anger one who has given evidence of so much

affection for us. For, even if you destroy the city and burn it, if you slay us or do anything else that comes into your mind, you still will not have exacted of us a penalty equal to our fault; and, in fact, before you pass sentence, we have already endured in our minds suffering worse than ten thousand deaths. For what could be more bitter than that we should be thus publicly convicted of having wantonly provoked to anger our benefactor, who had shown us so much love, and that the whole world should learn of this, and condemn the extremity of folly into which we have run?

“If barbarians had descended on our city and razed its walls and burned it, and gone off carrying away the captives of their arms, our state would have still been less miserable than it is today. What do I mean? Since you live, and have shown this wonderful favour to our city, we would have been able in that case to hope that you would grieve for our misfortunes, that you would restore us to our former state, and that we would enjoy a freedom more splendid than that which we had earlier enjoyed. But now that we have lost your good-will and the flame of your affection for us has been quenched, that affection which was a stronger protection for us than any wall, to what other refuge can we turn? In what other direction can we look, when we have provoked to wrath our gentle Emperor and our kindly father?

“What they have done to you may seem to be an intolerable wrong. Actually, the wrong that they have done to themselves is far worse than anything that anyone else could do to them: for now they cannot look any man straight in the face—they cannot even behold the sun with untroubled eyes, since the weight of their shame descends upon them from every side, and compels them to cover their faces. Since they have lost this confidence, their situation is more miserable than that of any slave; and they await the worst possible dishonour, recognizing both the magnitude of the crime that they have

committed, and the extremity of insolence into which they have light-heartedly entered; nor can they turn to anyone for help, since their fault has turned all the inhabitants of the world into their pitiless accusers.

“But, your majesty, if you are willing, there can be healing for this wound and a remedy for these tremendous ills. We have often seen this happen in the case of private individuals. Grave injuries have become the basis for deep affection. This is true also in the history of our human race. For when God created man and introduced him into Paradise and crowned him with great honour, the devil could not endure this great privilege which had been given to man, but bewitched him, and expelled him from his position of eminence in the creation. But God did not desert man. Far more than that. In exchange for Paradise Lost, he opened to us Heaven Gained; by so doing, he both manifested his great love for man, and inflicted on the devil his worst defeat.

“Your majesty, be an imitator of God. Up to this point the evil spirits have gained a complete victory, and have deprived of your good-will a city to which you had always shown quite special affection. Our request is that you would look at the situation as it really is. Impose on us whatever penalty you will; but let us not become outcasts from that affection which in the past you have always felt for us. Now, Sire, if I may use a somewhat bold form of speech, if you wish to establish complete victory over the evil spirits which have brought matters to this pass, show us even greater goodwill than in the past, and write again the name of our city in the list of those which are specially the object of your regard. For, if you break up and destroy and annihilate our city, you will be fulfilling to the letter the purpose of those evil spirits. But if you lay aside your wrath, and proclaim that you now love Antioch as you have always loved her in the past, you will be dealing those evil spirits a terrible blow, and will be challenging

them to the very heart of their affair, by making it evident that they have gained nothing whatever by their plot against us, and that the issue of the affair is exactly the contrary of that which they desired.

“It is right that you should act in this way, and have pity on a city of which the evil spirits became so bitterly jealous just because of the affection that you had shown toward it. For, if you had not shown it this measure of affection, they would not have concentrated all their power in order to bewitch it. So, although my way of putting it may be rather extreme, it is just the fact that you and your love for us have been the cause of the disaster that has befallen us.

“You have spoken in your defence; and your words are more bitter to us than any amount of burning and destruction. You say that you have been insulted, and that no ruler in history has been as badly treated as you have been. Granted; but, my wise and clement and pious Emperor, if you so wish, these very insults can procure for you a crown of glory more splendid than the diadem of sovereignty which you now wear. For this diadem is a sign of your princely excellence, and of the high regard in which you were held by him who transmitted it to you.<sup>1</sup> But the wreath of victory which can now be woven for you by your generosity will be yours alone—splendid evidence of your character and disposition; and in future men will praise you not so much for the splendour of the precious stones in your diadem as for the splendour of your victory over anger. They threw down your statues. True! If you wish, you can set up other statues more splendid than those that were cast down. But if you remit the penalties deserved by those who have done the wrong, and take no vengeance on them, the citizens will not set up in their market-place a statue of you in bronze or gold or inlaid with

<sup>1</sup> Theodosius had been appointed co-Emperor (Augustus) by the Emperor Gratian in A.D. 379.

precious stones; each man will set up in his own heart a statue made of something far more precious than any material substance, I mean of human kindness, of mercy; and as a result you will be commemorated by as many statues as there are men now living, or as shall live in the days to come. For not only we, but those who will come after us, and those who will follow after them, will hear of this good deed, and will admire and love you as though they personally had been the object of your benevolence.

“When I say this, I am not flattering you. I am simply telling you the truth. But, in order to make quite plain to you that it is not money and weapons and a multitude of subjects or any other such thing that make a monarch really famous, but rather nobility of character and gentleness, may I tell you an old tale? It is a tale about the blessed Constantine. It happened on one occasion that a statue of the Emperor had been pelted with stones. Many of his counsellors urged him to proceed against the offenders and to exact condign vengeance, saying that those who had thrown the stones at the statue had grievously wounded the face of the Emperor himself. They say that Constantine passed his hand over his head and face; and, smiling pleasantly, remarked, ‘I find no trace of any wound on my forehead. My head seems to be in an excellent state of health, and my face as well’. Then those counsellors blushed and were ashamed, and did not press their evil counsel any further. Even in our day this saying of Constantine is highly praised. Time has not withered it, or extinguished the memory of his magnanimity.

“Surely this was something greater than the trophies set up in memory of victory. Constantine founded many famous cities. He won great victories over the barbarians. We do not remember any of those things today. But even today this word of the Emperor is held in the highest respect; and those who come after us and those who follow them will still hear of it.

It is not specially remarkable that this saying of the Emperor is still passed on from mouth to mouth. What is remarkable is that those who speak of it always do so in such terms of eulogy and commendation; and that this praise is echoed from the lips of those who hear it. No one who hears the tale can keep silence. They cannot refrain from exclamation. They praise the speaker. They foretell that he will be the heir of countless blessings both in this life and in that which is to come. If on account of this one utterance he receives such glory from men, what crowns do you imagine that he will receive from God the lover of men?

“But why should I cite Constantine, and other examples of the same kind? I can appeal to you, your majesty, in your own name and in that of your own most praiseworthy actions in the past. Recall how, on a previous occasion, when this feast of Easter was drawing near, you sent a letter through the whole world, proclaiming liberty to those who were in prison, and the annulment of the charges that had been made against them. And, as though even this was not enough to show the generosity of your spirit, you added in your letters, ‘Would that I could call back those who have already departed, and restore to them that life which they once enjoyed’. I pray you now to remember the words that you then wrote; for this is the time to call back those who have already departed, and to restore them to that life which they once enjoyed. For, although sentence has not yet been passed, they are already as good as dead, and the whole city is near to the gates of the pit. I pray you, then, call this city back to life, without money, without expense, without delay, and without the expenditure of any labour. You have only to speak; that in itself is enough to lift up this city which now lies prostrate on its face.

“Give the city the privilege of taking its name for the future from your generosity; for, if you remit these due

penalties, it will feel less gratitude to its original founder than to you for your clemency. And rightly so. For he simply called it into existence, and did no more. But, now that it had grown and become great, and after a long period of prosperity had been cast down to the ground, you will have raised it up again to life. If, after enemies had captured the city and barbarians had overrun it, you had delivered the city, that would have been a remarkable achievement—yet less remarkable than what you will now be doing if you spare the city. For such deliverances have often in the past been wrought by many kings. But you will be the very first sovereign to do such a thing as this—a thing that no one could expect or would dare to hope for.

“For, after all, it is not so very remarkable, indeed it happens almost every day, that a ruler should come to the rescue of his subjects; but this—that a ruler who has been so badly treated should lay aside his anger—this indeed surpasses all the limits of normal human nature.

“Let me remind you that what you are considering now is not simply the fate of one city, but the cause of your own reputation, and indeed I may say of the whole Christian world. At this moment Jews and Greeks, and the whole civilized world—yes I can add the barbarians too, for they also have heard what has happened—are looking eagerly towards you, waiting to see what decision you will come to in the matter that now lies before you. If your decision is generous and kindly, they will all praise our religion and glorify God; and they will say to one another, ‘Upon my word, this Christianity really is a great power. Here is a man without a rival in dignity in the whole world, a man with power to kill and to destroy; yet it restrains him, and teaches him to control his anger, and to manifest a moderation such as could hardly be expected in an ordinary citizen. Of a truth the God of the Christians is a great God, who turns men into

angels, and raises them far above the possibilities of ordinary human nature'.

"I pray you to disregard another and grave cause for anxiety, and to pay no attention to those who will tell you that, if you fail to punish Antioch, other cities will be corrupted and will hold the imperial authority in contempt. For, if it were the case that you had failed to punish us because you lacked the power, or that those who did the wrong had evidently excelled you in strength, or that it could be supposed that you and your adversaries were equally matched, there might be some reasonable grounds for such an anxiety. But look at the facts. Here are men in a state of abject terror, already half dead from fear. In my person they have cast themselves at your feet; day by day they expect nothing but utter destruction; together they plead with you for mercy; they look up to heaven and plead with God to come and lend His aid to this my embassy; like those who have reached their very last breath, each man is asking himself what provision he can make for those of his household. All this being so, is not any such anxiety on your part a little superfluous? Even if sentence of death had actually been passed upon them, they could not suffer as much as they now suffer, having passed so many days in fear and trembling. When evening comes, they have no hope that they will live to see the dawn; when day dawns, they do not believe that they will live until the evening. Many who have taken refuge in the wilderness and made their home in inaccessible places, have fallen victims to wild beasts; I speak now not only of men, but of little children, and free women of honourable position, who for many days and nights have hidden themselves in caverns and ravines and holes of the desert.

"The city has fallen victim to a new kind of captivity. The houses and the walls are standing—and yet it suffers a fate worse than that of the cities that have been burned. No

barbarian is near; no enemy is evident on the skyline; and yet their situation is more miserable than that of captives taken in war; day by day even the rustling of a leaf is enough to scare them away. The whole world knows of this; and, even if they had seen the city razed to the ground, they could not have received a more salutary lesson than that which has been imparted to them simply through hearing of the lamentable situation of Antioch. So do not for a moment imagine that your clemency could make other cities worse than they now are. Even if you destroyed the cities, you could not read them a severer lesson than that which they can learn from Antioch, and its appalling and uncertain expectation of what may fall upon it, an expectation in itself far more painful than the severest punishment.

“So, I pray you, do not prolong their agony, but give them an opportunity to breathe again. For to punish the guilty and to demand vengeance for crimes that have been committed is easy—anyone can do it; but to spare those who have insolently sinned, and to pardon those who have committed unpardonable offences—I doubt whether one could find even one or two in the world who are capable of such magnanimity—and this is specially difficult, when the one who has been offended is a ruler. And again, to keep men in subjection through fear is quite easy; but to make all men your sworn friends, and to persuade all to hold themselves well affected to your government, and bound to pray not only publicly but privately as well for the welfare of your empire—that is indeed hard to accomplish. You may spend a million of money; you may set great armies in motion; but, whatever efforts you may expend, it is not easy to win for yourself the affection of a multitude of men. But now for you this is quite easy and straightforward. For those who have received this benefit at your hands, and those who have heard of what you have done no less than those who have actually received

the benefit, will be well disposed towards you. How much would it cost you in the way of labour and of money to win to your side the whole world in a moment of time, and to persuade all those who are now living and all those who are yet to come to offer on your behalf just such prayers as they offer up on behalf of their own children?

“We have been speaking of the reward you may gain from men. But consider also that which you may gain from God, not only in consideration of your own righteous act at this time, but also of those righteous acts that may be performed by others in times yet to come. Let us suppose that in some future time something occurs similar to what has now happened in Antioch—I pray that no such thing may ever happen!—and that some of those who have been insulted are inclined to exact condign vengeance on those who have insulted them; your self-control on this occasion will be better than any instruction or persuasion that can be brought to bear on them; and, when such an example of moderation is presented to them, they will blush and be ashamed if they are found unable to live up to such a standard. So, if you act as I expect and hope, you will be the teacher of all future times, and you will stand out head and shoulders above them, even if they rise to the same level of self-restraint which we now expect of you. For there is an immense difference between the one who first displays such an astonishing measure of gentleness, and those who merely look to another and imitate an example which has already been set them. So, whatever measure of kindness and generosity may be manifested by those who come after you, you will always be a sharer in their reward. For the one who plants the root may be credited with all the fruit that grows from that root.

“So no one who comes after will be able to share with you the credit that accrues to you from this act of mercy. For this good deed will be yours and yours alone. But if in later times

any appear to emulate you in this righteous act, you will be able to claim an equal share of merit with them and your share in the reward will be greater than theirs, as the reward of a teacher is proportionately greater than that of his pupils. And, if no one is ever found to equal you, each succeeding generation will accord to you its due meed of praise and veneration.

“Think of the impression that will be left on the minds of posterity, if they hear that, when so great a city was liable to punishment and vengeance, and all were in terror, and among the generals and rulers and judges there was not a single one who dared to lift up his voice on behalf of those wretched criminals, one single old man, entrusted with the authority of the priesthood, came forward, and just by his presence and by the mere fact of meeting with him, changed the mind of the Emperor; and that what the Emperor was unwilling to grant to any other of his subjects, he accorded to this one old man out of respect for the laws of God.

“And, your majesty, I must point out to you that the city has paid you special honour in selecting me to undertake this embassy. For it was a notable and outstanding mark of their confidence in you to have recognized that, though the whole empire is subject to you, it is to the priests of God that you pay special honour, though in themselves they may be persons deserving of little consideration. And I come as an ambassador, not only from the citizens of Antioch but also from the common Lord of all angels and messengers, to remind your Grace and your Clemency that ‘If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive your trespasses’. So I bid you remember that day on which we shall have to give account for all that we have done. And remember that, if at any time it has happened that you yourself have done wrong, it will be possible for you by your judgment and decision in this matter to wipe out all your sins without toil and without sweat.

“Other men who go on embassies carry with them gold and silver and other gifts of the same sort. I come to your royal presence with nothing in my hand but the sacred laws of God; these I hold out to you as my sole and only gift. I urge you to imitate your Lord and Master, who, though we daily treat Him so ill, never ceases to pour down upon us all His own gracious gifts. Do not put our hopes to shame; do not frustrate the promises that we have made. One thing I wish to make quite plain to you. If you are willing to be reconciled and to take the city once more into your favour, and to lay aside your righteous wrath, I shall return with great confidence. But if you cast the city out of your favour, I do not say merely that I will never again see it or set foot in it—I will sever every connection with it, and enrol myself as citizen of some other city. God forbid that I should ever be citizen of a city with which you, most kindly and gracious of men, are not willing to come to terms and to be reconciled”.

Something of this kind and more to the same effect he said; and he produced so deep an effect on the Emperor that what followed was rather like that which we have read of in the story of Joseph. For when Joseph saw his brethren he was inclined to weep, but suppressed his emotions so as not to spoil the part which he was then playing. Similarly the Emperor was weeping at heart; but did not let it be seen because of all those who were standing by. But he was not able to retain his composure till the end, and try as best he might he could not but let the depth of his feeling be seen. For, after the bishop had finished his lengthy oration, no further discussion was necessary. The Emperor in reply gave expression to one single feeling, a far finer ornament for him than his diadem. What was it, then, that he said?

“It is nothing so very great or wonderful, if we give up our anger against men who have insolently done us wrong, since they are men, and we too are men; seeing that the Lord

of the whole universe, when He came down to this earth and was made a slave for our sakes and was crucified by those on whom He had showered such great benefits, prayed to His Father for those who crucified Him, saying 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do'. Is it then anything strange or remarkable, if we forgive our fellow-servants?"

Everything that took place on this occasion made it plain that the Emperor's words were no mere outward show, and not least that which I am about to relate. Our bishop was anxious to remain and to celebrate the feast of Easter together with the Emperor. The Emperor, however, urged him to make all speed and haste, and himself to bring the good news to the people of Antioch. "I know", said the Emperor, "that their souls are at present in a whirl of emotion, and there are many lingering effects of the time of suffering. Away! Bid them be of good cheer! For once they see the helmsman, they will remember the cruel storm no more; they will erase from their minds even the memory of the sorrows that are past". And when our bishop was very urgent with him, pleading with him to send his own son to Antioch, the Emperor, wishing to make it quite clear that he had wiped away from his mind every trace of anger, said, "Pray that these hindrances may be taken away, and that the flame of these present wars may be quenched; and then I myself will certainly come to Antioch in person".

Is it possible to imagine a more gentle disposition than that of this man? From now on let the pagans be ashamed—or rather not so much ashamed as brought to their senses. Let them leave the way of error which has come down to them from their fathers; let them turn to consider the power of the Christian Gospel, and learn from the Emperor and the bishop what the Christian way of life really is. Even this was not the end of the concern of our most godly Emperor. For after the bishop had left the capital and had already

crossed the sea, he sent messengers after him, being deeply concerned and anxious lest the bishop might waste time on the way and rob the city of half its joy by celebrating Easter in some other place than Antioch. Did ever any gentle father take such trouble about his children—and rebellious and insolent children at that?

Shall I tell you something more that redounds to the credit of our virtuous bishop? As the end of his long journey approached, he did not try to increase his speed, as another who was concerned about his own reputation might have done, in order to bring us in person that letter that would put an end to our dejection. Since he was able to travel only rather slowly, he urged one of his companions who was a skilled rider to go on ahead, so that the slowness of his own approach should not extend the period of our distress. His one concern was not that he himself should be the bearer of those wonderful and joyful tidings to the city, but that at the earliest possible moment our city should be able to breathe again.

When you received the news, you crowned the market-place with garlands; you lit torches; you strewed rushes before the shops; you celebrated high festival, as though the city had just been founded. And now, continue to do this in perpetuity, crowning yourselves not with flowers but with virtue, lighting the true light of good works as the adornment of your soul, rejoicing with spiritual joy. And let us never cease to give thanks to God for all these things—not merely for delivering us from our perils, but also for having allowed all these things to come to pass. For by both these things He has adorned our city. And, as we find it written in Scripture, proclaim these things to your children, and let them pass them on to their children, and they in turn to yet another generation so that all men who shall be born until the very end of the world, having learned of the great kindness of God manifested

to this city, may count us happy in that we were the objects of so great favour, and may reverently admire our ruler who raised up again the city that had fallen so low, and may themselves be profited, being stimulated to the pursuit of godliness by their knowledge of all the things that have happened here. For, if we keep all these things steadfastly in remembrance, the record of these events at Antioch will not merely profit us, but will profit in the very highest degree those who are to come after us.

So, bearing all these things in mind, let us ever render thanks to our loving God, not only for our deliverance from evil but also for that providence which allowed the evil to come upon us, having learned both from the holy Scriptures and from our own experiences that He always orders all things to our best advantage, in accordance with that loving-kindness which is His own special quality. So may we always profit by these things, and in the end attain to the kingdom of heaven in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

(Homily 21 : 2-4)

### 3. IN PRAISE OF ST. PAUL

#### *Introduction*

Chrysostom, as we have seen, had a special affection for the apostle Paul, whom in some ways he resembled, being small in stature and of fiery speech, and of whom he must often have thought in his own time of exile and suffering. At one time or another Chrysostom expounded almost all the Epistles of Paul. In addition, he has left seven "Panegyrics" or sermons in praise of the apostle. These are not based on any one particular text, but take up one aspect of the apostle's life, and deal with it as a cause for thanksgiving to God, and as an object for the emulation of the faithful. One of the seven deals with Paul's conversion. The last of the series, which is here translated, shows Paul as the standard-bearer of Christ, who goes boldly forward in the face of every kind of affliction, and makes use of every circumstance, however apparently unfavourable, to forward the preaching of the Gospel.

This sermon was probably preached on some special festival of the apostle; but it is not possible to date it in any particular year or month. It is considerably shorter than the typical Sunday homily, of which a specimen was given above. Although conversational in tone, and clearly addressed to a real congregation, it is in fact very carefully worked out and is an admirable specimen of composition, showing how one leading idea can be held throughout a discourse, illustrated from many different sides, and reinforced by a variety of applications. Even the apparent digressions are all related to the central theme, and the final sentences fittingly sum up the argument of all that has gone before.

### *St. Paul: the Seventh Panegyric*

When the standard-bearer of the Emperor, preceded by trumpeters and escorted by a throng of soldiers, enters any city, it is the usual thing for everyone in the city to run together, both to hear the music, and to see the standard borne aloft, and to admire the manly proportions of the one who bears it. Today Paul is entering not a city but the whole world. Let us then run together to the sight. For he too is a standard-bearer—not of any earthly emperor; the standard that he carries is the Cross of Christ the heavenly Lord. He is accompanied not by men but by angels, who come to do honour to the One whose sign is being carried, and to make themselves protectors of the one who bears it.

For, if those who remain in private stations and take no part in public affairs yet receive from the Lord of the universe angels as their guardians—as we read in Scripture, “the angel who has kept me safe from my youth up”<sup>1</sup>—how much more shall they who undertake responsibility for the whole world, and carry such a load of gifts, receive the aid of the powers that are from above! Now those who are accounted worthy of such honour by reason of some external dignity are clad in fine raiment, and have an ornament of gold about their necks, and are in every way splendid; but the apostle wears a chain instead of the gold, and what he carries is a cross; he is driven from pillar to post, he is flogged, he is half-starved. Now, do not frown, my dear listeners. For this apostolic array is far better and more splendid than that other, and is well-pleasing to God; and for this reason Paul does not grow weary of bearing it.

This is, indeed, the remarkable thing—that with the bonds and the scourges and the marks on his body, he is still more splendid than those who wear purple raiment and crowns.

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 48 : 16 “the angel who has redeemed me from all evil” (R.S.V.). Chrysostom is quoting from memory.

His very garments show that he is more splendid, and that what I have said is not an idle boast. You may lay any number of crowns and as many purple garments as you like on a sick man; they will not relieve to any degree at all the flame of his fever; but the napkins that were brought from the apostle' body, as soon as they were laid on the sick, put all their sicknesses to flight. Not unnaturally. If robbers see the Emperor's standard, they do not dare to approach it, but flee without once looking back; much more are diseases and evil spirits put to flight, when they see that sign of the Cross.

Paul carried the Cross, not that he might carry it alone, but that he might make all others like himself, and teach them also how to bear the Cross. It is for this reason that he says, "Be imitators of me . . . as you have an example in us",<sup>1</sup> and again, "What you have heard and seen in me, do";<sup>2</sup> and "It has been granted to us that for the sake of Christ we should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake".<sup>3</sup> In the everyday world marks of distinction are most notable when they are conferred on one man only. But in the case of spiritual blessings the exact opposite is the case. For there honour shines brightest when it makes many others sharers in its eminence, and when the one who possesses it does not hug it to himself alone, but enables many others to share the benefit with him.

So you see that all are standard-bearers; each one bears the name of Christ before nations and kings, face to face with hell itself, face to face with everlasting judgment. No, that is not what he says. For those others were not able so to bear it. You see in Paul what valour our human nature is capable of. For what is nobler than a man, a mortal man, of real constancy? Can you show me anything greater than this, or even equal to

<sup>1</sup> Phil. 3 : 17.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. 4 : 9.

<sup>3</sup> Phil. 1 : 29.

it? Is not the man who spoke this word worth many angels and archangels? Here is a man in a mortal body and liable to death, who has given up for Christ every single thing that he possessed—yes, and a good many things which he did not possess as well; for he has given up for Him things present and things to come and height and depth and every other created thing. What would he not have said and done, if he had been a spiritual creature without a body?

I do admire the angels, because they have been accounted worthy of this high estate; but not just because they are spirits without body. The devil is a spirit without body and is invisible; but he is more miserable than any other, because he offended against God who made him. For this reason, we say that men are miserable, not just because we see them burdened with bodies of flesh, but when we see them using those bodies in the wrong way. For this Paul too carried the burden of the body.

How then, did he come to be such a man as he was? Partly through his own natural gifts, and partly by the gift of God; and the gift of God was given because of what he was through his natural gifts; “for God shows no partiality”.<sup>1</sup>

Now if you ask, how is it possible for us to imitate people like Paul, hear what he says: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ”.<sup>2</sup> He was an imitator of Christ—and you cannot summon up courage to imitate your fellow-servant? He aspired to follow the Master himself; and you are not willing to follow one who like yourself is a servant? What defence do you think you will be able to offer for your timidity?

How then, did Paul imitate Christ? Look back to the very beginning, and to his introduction into the life of a

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 2 : 11.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 11 : 1.

Christian. He came up from the sacred stream of baptism inflamed with such a fire that he would not wait for any teacher. He did not wait for Peter. He did not go to see James, or anyone else. Carried away by his enthusiasm, he so set the city of Damascus on fire that he brought a violent storm of hostility about his ears. In the days when he was still a Jew, he had done more than anyone could have required of him—imprisoning, hanging, killing the Christians. We see the same spirit in Moses. No one had appointed him to the office; but when he saw an Egyptian wronging one of his own fellow-countrymen, he stepped in to prevent him. That is the sign of a noble nature and of a fine character, when a man will not stand by and see another injured and do nothing about it—even though no one may have authorized him to interfere. And that Moses did right in leaping into this position of leadership God later made plain by actually appointing him as leader. And he did exactly the same in the case of Paul. God showed that he had done right in taking to himself the office of preacher and teacher, by very soon exalting him in regular fashion to the office of a teacher.

Now, if these two men had leaped into action through a desire for honour or pre-eminence, they might rightly have been accused of serving no more than their own interests. But if they joyfully accepted danger and welcomed death, simply in order that they might be the means of salvation to other men, who is there base enough to criticize such enthusiasm? God in His judgment made it plain that it was not from any selfish motive, but simply in order to rescue the perishing that these two men had put themselves forward in this way. It was made equally plain by the disaster that befell those who in an evil spirit sought after pre-eminence. There was an occasion when certain men sought after rule and authority; they all died, some being consumed by the flames, and others being swallowed up when the earth opened her

mouth against them.<sup>1</sup> They desired high office not because they desired to be of service to others, but simply in order that they themselves might be distinguished. Uzziah leaped in where he had no right to be—and he became unclean.<sup>2</sup> Simon leaped in, and he was condemned and found himself in a situation of frightful danger.<sup>3</sup> So now Paul leaps in; and he is crowned, not with the priesthood and honour, but with ministry and toil and danger. And it was because he ran with such zeal and eagerness, that he was proclaimed victor, and was famous even from the beginning of his Christian life.

One who has been regularly appointed to an office is regarded as deserving of all the severer punishment, if he fails to carry out the duties of his office in a fitting manner. And one who, even though not regularly appointed, takes upon him the burden—I do not say of the priesthood, but of the common well-being—and carries out his duties fittingly, is worthy of the highest honour.

So this Paul, who was more passionate than fire, did not remain a single day in idleness; but the moment he came forth from the sacred fount of waters, he kindled a great flame of fire about himself. He took no account of dangers, or of the mockery or contempt of the Jews, or of the distrust in which he was held by them, or anything else. He had now received new eyes, the eyes of love, and another mind; and, charging down with the force of a mountain torrent, he swept away all the defences of the Jews, proving from Scripture that Jesus is the Christ.

But he had not yet received many of the gifts of grace, and he had not yet been counted worthy of the crowning

<sup>1</sup> The reference is to the conspiracy of Korah, Dathan and Abiram recorded in Numbers 16.

<sup>2</sup> For the story of Uzziah, who unlawfully entered the Temple and became a leper, see 2 Chron. 26 : 19.

<sup>3</sup> For Simon Magus and his encounter with Peter, see Acts 8 : 18ff.

gifts of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless he was all on fire; his every action showed that in his heart of hearts he was ready even to die; he did all this as though he was trying to make up for what he had done in time past, and he contrived to throw himself into that place where the battle was hottest and most full of perils and terrors.

And yet, bold and impulsive as he was, breathing out fire, in relation to his teachers he was so gentle and biddable that, in the highest flood of his eagerness, he never withstood them. When he was raging like a madman in his eagerness to preach Christ, they told him that he must go away to Tarsus and Caesarea; he did not refuse. They told him that he must be let down from the wall in a basket; he put up with even that. They advised him to shave his head; he agreed. They told him that he should not go into the theatre; he accepted their advice. So at all times he was considerate of the well-being of the believers; he worked for peace and for harmony; but he would not let anything deter him from the work of preaching.

Now, when you read that he sent his nephew to the captain of the guard,<sup>1</sup> in order to forestall certain dangers that threatened him, and that he appealed to Caesar,<sup>2</sup> and that he was eager to make his way to Rome, do not imagine that these are signs of any lack of courage. He groaned at the necessity of continuing in this life; how would he not far rather have chosen to be with Christ? He despised the heavens; he looked down even on the angels because of what he had in Christ. How should he then set his heart on the things of this world? Why then did he take these precautions for his own safety? It was simply in order that he might continue longer in the work of preaching, and that when the time came for him to leave the world, he might leave it in the company of many believers, each with his own crown. For he

<sup>1</sup> See Acts 23 : 16-22.

<sup>2</sup> See Acts 25 : 11.

feared that he might leave the world poor and a beggar as far as the salvation of others was concerned. For that reason he said "To remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account".<sup>1</sup>

So, although he saw that the tribunal was inclined to pass a favourable judgment in his case—as Festus said, "This man could have been set free, if he had not appealed to Caesar"<sup>2</sup>—and though he was in chains, and carried off with a large number of others who had committed all kinds of terrible crimes, he was not ashamed of being carried off as a prisoner along with them, but took counsel for the good of all his fellow-travellers—as far as he himself was concerned he was completely confident, knowing himself to be in safety; and thus bound with a chain he set out on this long sea voyage, rejoicing as though he were setting out to take over some eminent post of honour. He did not despise his fellow-voyagers; he turned their panic into confidence by telling them of the vision which he had seen, and thus giving them the assurance that all who sailed with him would be kept safe on his account.<sup>3</sup> And this he did, not to make himself out to be some great person, but to make sure that they would pay attention to the advice he was about to give. It was for this reason that God allowed the storm to arise, that, both where Paul's advice was disregarded and where it was accepted, in all things the grace of God which rested on Paul might be made manifest. Paul had advised them not to sail. His advice was disregarded and in consequence all fell into the extremity of danger.<sup>4</sup> For all that, he did not put on airs, but cared for them as a father for his children, and did everything in his power to make sure that no one perished.

<sup>1</sup> Phil. 1 : 24.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 26 : 32.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 27 : 21–26.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 27 : 9–10.

When he reaches Rome, see how temperately he engages in argument, how courageously he rebukes those who will not believe. He is not content to remain there; from Rome he moves rapidly on to Spain. His courage rises with danger. In a dangerous situation he appears bolder than ever, and not only he but his followers also through his example. If they had seen him giving in and losing heart, they too no doubt would have grown discouraged. But when they saw him growing in boldness, taking the initiative, engaging ever more eagerly in the fray, they too took part boldly in the work of preaching. Paul tells us plainly that this was how things worked out: "Most of the brethren have been made confident in the Lord because of my imprisonment, and are much more bold to speak the word of God without fear".<sup>1</sup>

Take the example of a courageous general. If he does not merely smite and kill others but is himself wounded in the fray, he gives renewed courage to those who are fighting under him, and more by the wounds which he receives than by those which he inflicts. For when they see him bathed in blood yet bearing his wounds bravely, in spite of them not yielding ground to the enemy but standing firm and brandishing his spear, and striking the foeman, and not yielding to the pain of his wounds, they are encouraged themselves to face the foe with greater eagerness than before. This is what happened in the case of Paul. For when they saw him bound with chains and yet preaching in the prison-house, flogged and yet exercising an influence even on those who had flogged him, they received a new access of courage. To make this quite clear, he does not simply say "have been made confident". He adds, "much more bold to speak the word of God without fear". He means that the brethren were bolder now that he was in jail than they had been earlier when he was a free man. And Paul too received a new access of courage. This was

<sup>1</sup> Phil. 1 : 14.

when he showed himself at his boldest against the enemy; for him additional persecution meant an addition of courage—this was for him a ground for even greater boldness. On one occasion he was imprisoned; such power went forth from him that it shook the foundations and caused the doors to fly open and brought the jailer round to his side.<sup>1</sup> On another occasion he almost persuaded his judge, so that the judge said, “In a short time you think to make me a Christian”.<sup>2</sup> In one place he was stoned; he entered the very city which had stoned him, and converted it.<sup>3</sup> They called him out intending to judge him—sometimes Jews, sometimes Athenians; and those who would have been his judges became his disciples, and those who were his adversaries became his pupils.

If fire takes hold on various kinds of material, the fire itself grows; it uses whatever comes in its way for its own increase. So it was with the tongue of Paul. It asserted its power on all those whom it encountered. Those who fought against him were caught before long by the power of his words and became fuel for that spiritual fire; and by their means the word took hold again and spread yet further. That is why he said, “I am bound, but the word of God is not bound”.<sup>4</sup>

They drove him into exile. Outwardly this appeared to be persecution; what it really meant was the sending forth of teachers. His enemies did exactly what his friends and allies would have wished to do. They would not allow him to remain still in one place; but through their plots and their orders of expulsion they drove the physician from pillar to post, so that all could hear the message from his mouth. They haled him off to the highest court; all that they did was to bring a blessing on the capital city.

<sup>1</sup> Acts 16 : 25–34.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 26 : 28.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 14 : 19–23.

<sup>4</sup> cf. 2 Tim. 2 : 9.

Naturally this upset the Jews very much; and we find them saying of the apostles, "What shall we do with these men?"<sup>1</sup> They meant, "Every step that we take to put them down seems only to make them increase". They handed Paul over to the jailer, telling him to keep him safely.<sup>2</sup> What happened was that the jailer came much more effectively into Paul's safe-keeping. They packed him off with jail-birds, to make sure that he should not escape; he spent his time instructing the jail-birds. They threatened him with endless punishments in order to put a stop to the preaching; he was only the more inspired to carry it on.

We may think of the parallel case in the life of our Lord. The Jews said, "Let us kill him, lest the Romans come and destroy our city and our nation".<sup>3</sup> What happened was the very opposite of what they expected. They killed Jesus; for that very reason the Romans came and destroyed their national existence and their city. The very things that they thought would be a hindrance to the preaching turned out to be a help to it. This is just what happened with Paul's preaching. All those things which his enemies planned as obstacles to the preaching merely increased Paul's power, and raised him to this marvellous eminence as a witness to Christ.

So let us give thanks to our God who is so skilful in contriving; let us pay all honour to Paul, through whom all these things were wrought; and let us pray that we may come to those same good things, through the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom and with whom be glory to the Father, together with the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Acts 4 : 16.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 16 : 23.

<sup>3</sup> Jn. 11 : 48. Chrysostom is quoting from memory.

#### 4. THE POPULAR PREACHER AND HIS TROUBLES

*From Chrysostom's Thirtieth Homily on the Acts of the Apostles*

There are many preachers who make long sermons; if they are well applauded, they are as glad as if they had obtained a kingdom; if they bring their sermon to an end in silence, their despondency is worse, I may almost say, than hell. It is this that ruins churches, that you do not seek to hear sermons that touch the heart, but sermons that will delight your ears, just as if you were listening to singers and lute players. And we preachers humour fancies instead of trying to crush them. We act like a father who gives a sick child a cake or an ice, or something else that is merely nice to eat—just because he asks for it; and takes no pains to give him what is good for him; and then when the doctors blame him says, "I could not bear to hear my child cry". That is what we do when we elaborate beautiful sentences, fine combinations and harmonies, to please and not to profit, and not to better your conduct. Believe me, I am not speaking at random; when you applaud me as I speak, I feel at the moment as it is natural for a man to feel. I will make a clean breast of it. Why should I not? I am delighted and overjoyed. And when I go home and reflect that the people who have been applauding me have received no benefit, and indeed that whatever benefit they might have had has been killed by the applause, I feel as though I had spoken altogether in vain, and I say to myself, "What is the good of all your labours, seeing that your hearers don't want to reap any fruit out of all that you say?" And I have often thought of laying down a rule prohibiting all applause, and urging you to listen in silence.

## *About this book . . .*

What did it feel like to live in Antioch fifteen centuries ago? What was it like to be a Christian in the Roman Empire fifty years after Constantine had made Christianity the favoured religion in the Empire? We are fortunate in having a great many letters and sermons from that period, and through them we can come very close to Christians of a distant date, who turn out to be perhaps not so different after all from ourselves. The most famous preacher of that century was John, who because of his eloquence came to be known as Chrysostom, the golden-mouthed. Great churches were always crowded, when he preached; the pulpit, as he used it, served often for comment on contemporary affairs, as well as for instruction in the Christian faith.

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